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#8

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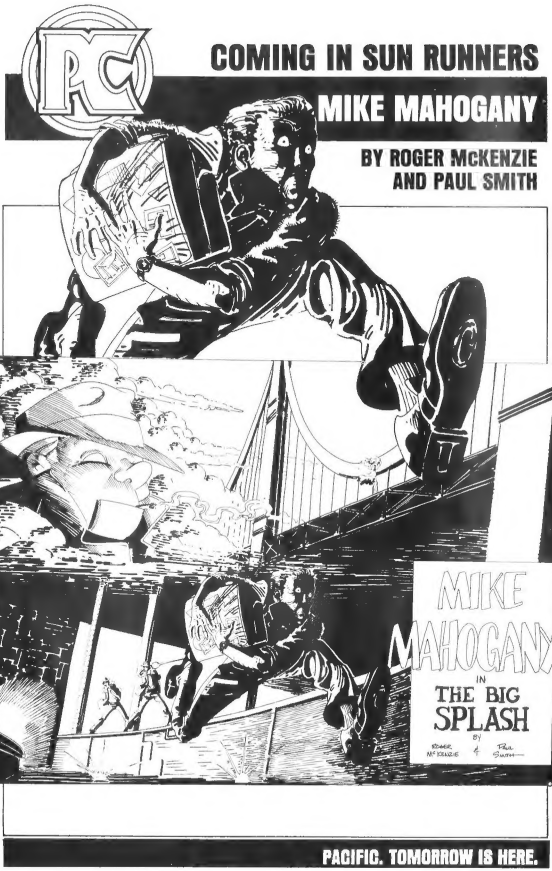
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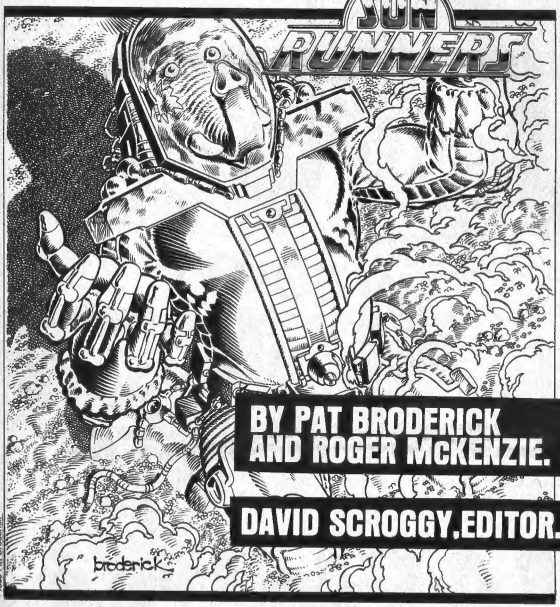

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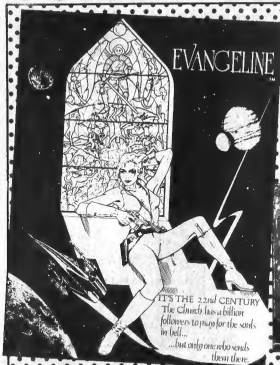
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UP FRONT

Alternatives.

Ever since COMICS INTERVIEW #1, we've been receiving requests to include more of the alternative and independent publishers.

From the start, it has always been the intention of **Jim Salicrup** and myself to offer coverage of the comics field — from top to bottom (creative to business people, past and present) — and from side to side (major and minor publishers, with all stops between, foreign and domestic).

The only problem we've had has been one of space. Never too little material — always too much. So we've been squeezing in a wide range of interviews, alternating departments and emphasis from issue to issue, much as I warned that we would way back in #1. By doing so, we've covered quite a variety of areas and individuals. And a healthy, fair share of alternatives and independents.

Here in #8, we continue the tradition, with the **Mike Baron** and **Steve Grant** conversation, as well as an interview with **Bill Griffith**, the man behind the Zippy the Pinhead phenomenon, and a peek inside British comics giant IPC, thanks to **Richard Burton.**

Alternatives?

We offer them in COMICS INTERVIEW — and, best of all, without sacrificing coverage of the best and brightest in mainstream comics, or the valuable insights of veteran industry insiders.

As for needing more space, we're finally going to have it — for one issue, at least. COMICS INTERVIEW #9 will be a giant-size special issue, sort of a celebration in honor of all the above — so watch for the **Walt Simonson** THOR cover.

We'll see you there!

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"Superman, Batman, the Outsiders, the JLA, an alien race, two worlds. Have the plot by tomorrow."

WORLD'S FINEST #300

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In case you haven't yet read issue #300 of WORLD'S FINEST COMICS, don't worry — what follows is only a preliminary plotting session that won't spoil the story.

What it will do is offer a glimpse into the give-and-take of an actual inside-the-industry editorial conference involving more than one writer and more than a dozen top comics characters — ranging from Superman and Batman to the Justice League of America to the Outsiders to the new Teen Titans — in a tale that spans two worlds. But it wasn't just work — it was a lot of fun, as you'll see.

WORLD'S FINEST editor Roger Slifer met with writer Mike Barr and myself at the Kiyoko Japanese restaurant on 56th Street in Manhattan. Over a lunch of chicken teriyaki, tempura, cokes and plum wine, we tackled the task at hand . . .

— DAK

ROGER SLIFER: *Since plots for the preceding two issues are still in Dave's head, Mike — we'll have to fill you in on what leads up to WORLD'S FINEST #300. Batman and Superman have gone to another world. The planet Olda has two essential factions, both of which are trying to invade Earth. But one of which is loathe to kill all Earth's population, while the other faction doesn't care — they want to invade and wipe us out. Superman has just rescued Earth by saving the moon from being exploded by a member of a group called The Pantheon. Otherwise, it would already have been total genocide against the whole human race.*

MIKE W. BARR: Which is going some!

ROGER: *At the end of #299, Superman has saved us all. So he's back here on Earth — but Batman is still on the alien planet, and Superman is helpless there.*

DAK: The other world has a red sun. When Superman's there, he obviously doesn't have his powers. Well, he passed through a portal when he came back to save Earth — but when he tries to return through it to rescue Batman, it's been sealed up from the other side to stop him. It's strictly one way now.

MIKE: Whoops.

DAK: He can't just fly there, because as soon as Superman gets near the red sun of Olda, he'll be stranded in space and he won't survive.

MIKE: What a bummer.

ROGER: *So Batman's stranded on the other world. You see, the factions on Olda have been struggling over access to this portal . . . er, should we tell him it's a Cosmic Tree?*

DAK (Laughter.): No.

ROGER: *In a general way, we've got to get the JLA and the Outsiders involved in this. It would make sense for Superman to say, "Gee, I can't go there, but if I take the JLA close enough, then we can all descend together to this world, and maybe we can make sense out of this mess."*

"Just introducing the characters will

MIKE: Yeah. And the JLA would not be affected by the red sun.

ROGER: *Right. I like the idea of Superman being back on this world without powers again — but alongside the JLA, trying to lead them in this battle — in, you know, a non-super mode.*

MIKE: They have to protect *him* for a change.

DAK: But this world is not technologically advanced and it has no superheroes. So what do the JLA do? They can't just stand around and look at the aliens. And that's not all! There are some elements we haven't told you about. *(Laughter.)*

ROGER: *Now for the complicated parts!*

DAK: You need to know what went on in previous issues, because it may be *germane.* There is a new group of villains, called The Pantheon. WORLD'S FINEST #296-298 is a continued story, in which three of the villains are introduced in Part One, three of them in Part Two, and the truly massive super-villain known as Zeta in Part Three. Zeta is a strange guy. He's an ex-priest, a power seeker, and he becomes a villain in the class of Galactus, although with different powers and motivations entirely. He goes up against Superman — and it's not as if Superman has a clear-cut victory. Superman has both a physical confrontation with him, but also a philosophical one, in which he says, "Now that you've got all this power, and you can reshape the Earth, and so forth, what are you going to do with it?" And Zeta's previous motivations are kind of rendered pointless at that stage.

ROGER: *He's been in pursuit of power all the time, but now that he's got it —*

DAK: — he kind of has to rethink things. At the end of #298, he steps into this portal, but he doesn't go to the world at the other end, he just stays sort of midway between Earth and Olda.

MIKE: Mmm.

DAK: So he's on hold, if we want to bring him back. He would be deserving of being up against the JLA. Also available are the six other defeated Pantheon people, who are all lesser godlike beings. That's about as simple as it can be made.

ROGER: *The resolution of this whole special issue is that Batman and Superman have to get back together again, be friends, be pals —*

MIKE: Right.

ROGER: *— after seeing each other's viewpoint. We started to set them up in #299.*

DAK: Yeah, Batman draws a parallel. Before they go over to this other world, he can't help saying, "Isn't this what we got in a tiff over, Superman? You wouldn't violate national borders — but now we're going into other worlds and messing around?" Batman, in effect, gets to say, "I told you so."

MIKE: That's a good idea.

DAK: But how do we resolve it? The thing is, this alien planet is overpopulated. Superman and Batman are faced with: Do we let them go to Earth, in which case all the *Earth-people* get screwed, or do we force them to stay put, in which case *they* all get screwed.

MIKE: What artist is going to draw all this?

DAK: Just introducing the characters will take the whole issue. *(Laughter.)*

MIKE: Really!

ROGER: *Well, there you are, Mike — Superman, Batman, the Outsiders, the JLA, Zeta and the Pantheon, an alien race, two worlds. Have the plot by tomorrow.*

MIKE: Piece of cake.

DAK: Where's **Jack Kirby** when you need him? *(Laughter.)*

MIKE: Actually, I was trying to keep the Outsiders out of outer space . . .

ROGER: *Well, maybe the JLA goes to this other world, but the Outsiders meanwhile are trying to hold off aliens here on Earth.*

DAK: I think that we need a strong villain.

MIKE: Yes.

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DAK: Otherwise, we will just have unfocused hordes. Now, either that villain is Zeta or someone we come up with out of the clear blue . . .

ROGER: *Mmm-hmm.*

DAK: Maybe we could turn Zeta loose over there, you know, to wreak *real* havoc!

MIKE: With the alien world?

DAK: Yeah. Because we can't do extreme things like tear our Earth in half — there are limitations.

MIKE: We could, but I can hear the continuity buffs right now —

ROGER: *Yeah. "It wasn't destroyed in this comic."*

DAK: Over in the other world if we wanted to do something on a massive scale, we could do it with impunity.

MIKE: Mmm-hmh. (Pause). So we have the JLA fighting Zeta on the other world . . .

DAK: Right. And Superman could be leading them, but without any powers.

MIKE: Mmm-hmm.

DAK: But what would Zeta be up to? What's he decided is worth doing?

ROGER: *I don't know. And why does he decide to do it there and not on Earth?*

DAK: He has the power to transform people. To change them.

MIKE: Zeta? Change them into what?

DAK: Whatever he wants. He effects a lot of physical changes on people and things in #298, so if he went over to Olda with some goal or design in mind, he could certainly do such things.

MIKE: Let's come back to the Cosmic Tree. Its purpose is — ?

DAK: Transportation.

ROGER: *You see, what happens is that the original Tree, which is on Olda, sends out a seedling, and once the seedling takes root on another world, which is what's happened to Earth, the two Trees act like sending and receiving stations.*

DAK: If you stepped into the Cosmic Tree on this other world, you would come out of the other Tree here.

MIKE: Right.

DAK: So . . . if all of this stuff goes on, there has to be a motivation. Like, you know, what would Zeta be doing? What would be JLA-level?

ROGER: *You know more about Zeta than we do — I haven't even seen the plot on Zeta yet.*

DAK: As for Zeta, once he has all this power, the petty stuff seems kind of pointless. So he's wide open in terms of what we can do with him. I mean, he could decide to be a swell guy, he could be a terrible guy, he could do *anything.*

Now you tell me about the JLA, Mike

take up the whole issue. (Laughter.)"

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Pencils by Ross Andru for WORLD'S FINEST COMICS #300.

— exactly who is in the JLA this month?

MIKE: Let's see . . . Superman, Wonder Woman, Green Arrow, Black Canary, Red Tomato . . .

ROGER: *Green Lantern?*

MIKE: I don't know about Green Lantern. I know Green Arrow is. I don't know if Green Lantern will be back on Earth by this point. But Green Arrow and Black Canary, definitely.

ROGER: *Now, is Flash still in there, or is he currently involved in his own story? I know he's in jail on Earth, but —*

MIKE: Ahh . . . yeah, he is. I don't know what Len's decided to do about that yet. Anyway, there's the ever-popular Firestorm, of course, and Aquaman and Zatanna.

Tell me, guys, is there just one portal on Earth, or are there more?

ROGER: *Only one. But once they got to Earth, they could go anywhere. The roots of the tree can take them anywhere.*

DAK: Once they're on Earth, everywhere the Tree roots grow, they can go. The Tree roots have come up in all major cities — which paves the way for hordes of aliens invading major cities.

MIKE: Oh, how could I forget — Hawkman's in the JLA, too.

DAK: I'm onto something. If we had alien hordes coming up in different cities, and if the Outsiders were the ones who stayed Earthside, that would give you an opportunity to break them up, Mike, sending them to different cities and different situations. That would pretty well take care of the Outsiders part of it. I have no idea what the JLA part of it would be, but —

ROGER: *It could also mean that if you wanted to keep any of the JLA on Earth, you could send them off on Earth battles, too. You could have their home cities being the ones that are affected, and we could even come up with some team-up situations.*

MIKE: How do the roots work? How big are they?

ROGER: *They're enormous.*

DAK: The Cosmic Tree works this way: It's in South Africa, and it is growing fast. Its roots have spread all through the Earth, and it's already caused a bunch of quakes

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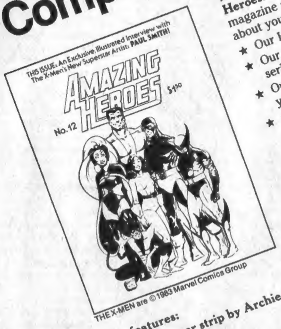

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"We could kill off the whole JLA . . ."

in all the different major cities. That's how Superman first got involved. He was dashing everywhere. All the cities were having earthquakes. Finally these big roots came breaking out of the ground, and out of one appeared Omicron of The Pantheon. They had finally figured out how to use them as travel-lines. They can beam along them, as the aliens do on their own world. If you can get to the tree trunk you can go anywhere on them.

ROGER: *But you have to start at the trunk. In other words, you can't come directly from any spot on the alien world through the roots — you have to go through the Tree trunk.*

DAK: I was likening it to an airport. You can take many roads to the airport — but that's where you take the plane to jump off and fly someplace. You can't just jump off from where you start on the road.

MIKE: Right. You can't fly from Atlanta to Manhattan, you have to fly from Atlanta to LaGuardia airport, then take a taxi into Manhattan.

DAK: Yeah. So if the aliens come over here through the Cosmic Tree, they can use the roots to travel all over the Earth. And now, back to our heroes. What is it that they do? I mean, we shouldn't just have the heroes save the day for these irresponsible aliens, or it'll all eventually just happen again — they'll just repeat their irrational behavior.

MIKE: What if a lot of aliens were to get killed during this conflict — not by the super-heroes' doing, but where I'm going with this is, they would be the victims of the stuff they themselves have done.

DAK: We could get away with that, if the two alien factions destroy each other, but not if the heroes are involved.

ROGER: *Yeah. And it doesn't seem right if the heroes absolve them of responsibility.*

MIKE: Well, Superman could say, "Look, we can't let you move on to other planets and do this again. Because you have no right. We just can't let you, but we can help you reduce the population." *(Laughter.)* "Okay, every third one —"

DAK: "Have you heard of birth control?" Superman says.

MIKE: Maybe the heroes would help them, you know, by various super-scientific means.

ROGER: *I hate resorting to deus-ex-heroes: "Your problems have been solved. The super-heroes have arrived."*

MIKE: It is too convenient — yeah, I guess it is; it's also trite — to have them go to some other planet that would be unpopulated?

ROGER: *Yeah, it would be too convenient.*

DAK: Well, let's look at this from another angle, for a few minutes. If you had lots of power, all-consuming power, and you also had a great playground — this other world — lots of people to mess around with, you know — no super-heroes to get in your way — what would you do? I mean, if you, Mike, were suddenly God.

ROGER: *As if he isn't already. He thinks he is. Tell him the truth, Mike.*

DAK: What would you do, in this playground of yours? What could you do there that, when the JLA arrived to rescue Batman, would appall them and cause them to waggle their fingers at you?

ROGER: *Think big.*

MIKE: Domination . . . ah . . . *(Pause)*

DAK: I have a solution, maybe. What would be the ideal thing? Obviously, in a way, Zeta is of these people's making, even though he's an Earthman. He's born of the Cosmic Tree, and the alien seer was programming him. In effect, he's like a god to them. I mean, it befits The Pantheon angle, anyway.

MIKE: That's true.

DAK: What if, at the end of it — I still don't know exactly how — Zeta is the one who finally harnesses them, and is sort of left in charge. You know, maybe what their

From the Teen Titans' cameo in WF #300. Art by Perez, words by Wolfman.

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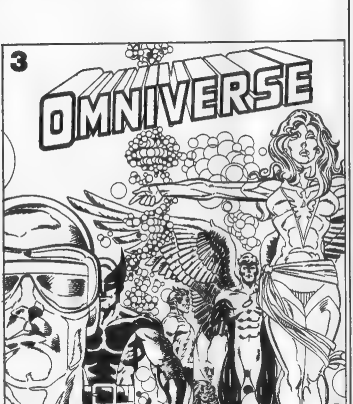

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Pencils by Ross Andru and Inks by Bob Smith.

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planet needs is a good Boss. And the last we see of him after whatever he's been doing has been thwarted — you know, he's the one left in charge. He's going to whip these people into shape and show them how to run their planet.

ROGER: *I like the idea of him being a "God of Guidance." It would give him a purpose, which is what he's been searching for.*

MIKE: Yeah! That would be right up Superman's alley, because assuming we could stage a confrontation between the two — I mean, dialogue — Superman says, "What is there to do with all that power? I'm pretty strong, but what do I do? I help people." Not that direct, but that sort of thing.

ROGER: *Yeah.*

DAK: But we still need to figure out what the JLA is going to be doing.

ROGER: *At least we know what our ending is. We can always work our way back.* (Laughter.)

DAK: It has a nice feel to it.

ROGER: *You might also want to consider putting the other Pantheon gods also in that world. It would almost be the reverse of Asgard, where you have this group of aliens as gods of Earth; on Olda you would have this group of Earth people that have been transformed to gods, running an alien world.*

DAK: That's a curious idea. In addition to Zeta, there's five Pantheon members remaining. If the alien hordes came through the roots, couldn't each of those Pantheon members be a leader of, you know, an invading division? The Outsiders are battling these hordes in each of the different cities, and each horde could be led by a Pantheon person. Plus, we've overlooked one important thing — the Cosmic Tree has very disruptive effects on the environment of Earth. It causes fluctuations in the time field, which I established in #296. That means the JLA/Outsiders Earthside could battle the alien invaders in *any* time period! That means we could have all kinds of cameo guest stars!

MIKE: Yeah, yeah! With the time changes, jeez, we could do, like, Sgt. Rock!

ROGER: *That's true!*

MIKE: I've always wanted to write Sgt. Rock! Yeah, I wanna do that!

DAK: That would be great.

MIKE: "Okay, you combat-happy Joes!" BUDDA-BUDDA-BUDDA! "This is World War II? What the hell is going on here? I don't understand this."

ROGER: *Who else can you come up with?*

MIKE: What about Jonah Hex?

DAK: Could we finally tear that flap of skin off?

MIKE: I'd like that.

ROGER: *Now, don't over do it.* (Laughter) *What'd be great is if, like, the Outsiders are fighting aliens, and suddenly they're shifted in time, and Jonah Hex helps out by shooting one of the aliens.*

DAK: Right — at a key moment. .

ROGER: *Can Jonah Hex kill people? Is that okay?*

MIKE: Are you kidding? The question is, does Jonah Hex ever *not* kill people? He kills guys who look at him funny . . . let alone aliens!

ROGER: *He could shoot the tentacles off 'em.* (Laughter) *We could have him put on a chicken costume.*

DAK: Let's kill them all! Big Death Issue!

MIKE: Big Death Issue!

ROGER: *We could kill off the whole JLA . . .*

MIKE: We could get new ones to take their places.

DAK: We could retire on the royalties.

ROGER: *I can see it now — Sgt. Rock! Blackhawk! Teen Titans!*

MIKE: How about Ma and Pa Kent!

ROGER: *"And Dave Kraft. . . as the Beaver."* (Laughter)

MIKE: We can't use the Camelot characters. No Camelot characters.

ROGER: *Aw, heck, Mike — can't they just find a sword in a stone and pull it out?* (Laughter.)

MIKE: Mmm-hmm.

DAK: Then, at the key moment —

That's where the tape ends — and it's just as well. If you want to know more about how it all came out, you'll just have to pick up WORLD'S FINEST COMICS #300 to see for yourself!

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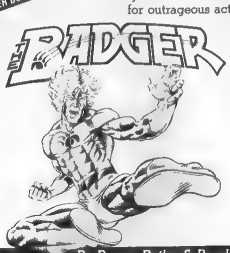

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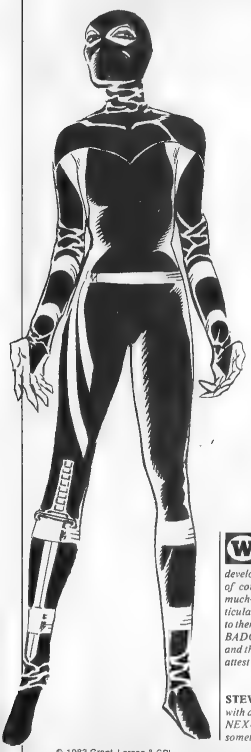
"The idea behind WHISPER is that life is a series of large and small betrayals."



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MIKE BARON & STEVE GRANT

When scripters Steve Grant and Mike Baron got together to talk about comics, their discussion developed into a fascinating examination of comics writing in general, and the much-overlooked role of theme in particular. Steve and Mike are no strangers to theme in comics, as readers of NEXUS, BADGER, the new WHISPER series — and the following colloquy — can readily attest . . .

STEVE GRANT: *Mike, you've come up with a series — and a character — called NEXUS, which is currently turning into something of an underground hit.*

MIKE BARON: Yeah, we hope it will be an overground hit. Fortunately, it is a ground-level hit at this stage.

STEVE: *I remember a long time ago, you popped into my office and said, "Hey, I want to do a superhero — a vigilante spaceman." The character has evolved considerably since then, hasn't he? His motivation is certainly a little unusual.*

MIKE: Unusual in that it is not clear-cut. Unlike other characters, he is not a cookie-cutter personality with his heart on his sleeve. Nexus has these weird, painful dreams that are visited upon him. The dreams are invariably of fiendish mass-murderers.

"Nexus is a moral person who feels anger

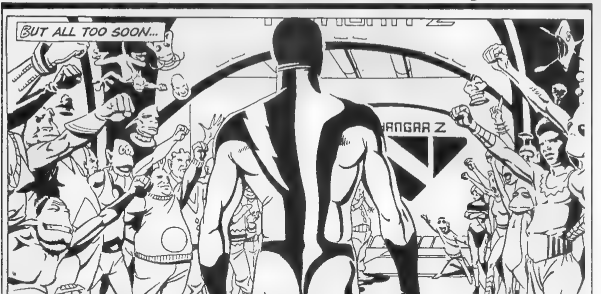
STEVE: *Aliens?*
MIKE: No, never — he always dreams of people of his own race, people who have committed monstrous crimes and have somehow escaped justice.
STEVE: *You say that these dreams are "visited upon him," implying they originate outside him. Where do the dreams come from?*
MIKE: That is one of the big secrets of the series. We're not keeping it a secret to tease the reader — we're keeping the origin of the dreams a secret because at this stage of the story, Nexus does not know, and we are going to keep the secret until Nexus finds out. But where they come from is integral to his character.

Because these dreams are originating outside him, they are more than the normal dreams everyone has. They cause him pain. Dreaming of these horrible crimes, he relives the suffering of the victims. When he awakes, he is in this tank, exhausted, and the tank replenishes his energies. Then — based on his experience and what these two creatures told him in the third black-and-white issue — he knows what he has to do: he has to go out and eliminate the cause of the dreams. Which means that he has to go out and kill the mass-murderer.
STEVE: *What will happen to him if he doesn't?*
MIKE: The dreams will keep recurring — only the physical effects upon him will become more and more real until he finally succumbs to them. For example — as we are going to show in issue #4, of the color series — suppose he dreams of somebody hanging a hundred thousand people. Nexus is going to start dreaming that *he* is hanging. He is going to wake up gasping for breath. If he doesn't go out and kill the guy responsible for the slaughter, the noose in the dreams is going to tighten around his neck until he strangles. And it is not psychosomatic — it is real. They would find his body with a rope-burn around his neck.
STEVE: *So his killing is a form of self-defense, then?*
MIKE: Essentially. When he goes out to deliver justice to one of these criminals, it *is* justice, no question about it. In fact, by simply killing them he is letting them off easy. But Nexus is also a complex and in many way confused young man, and like all of us he lets certain emotions — and I won't call them "base" emotions, although maybe they are — come to the surface occasionally: a sense of righteous anger and revenge. It is unavoidable. Not only is he a moral person who feels anger over the crimes because they offend his sense of justice, but when he dreams about the crimes, he absorbs a little of what the victims feel.
STEVE: *Yet he doesn't like being forced to go out and act as an executioner?*
MIKE: No, he doesn't. But with his whole life having been wrapped up in this mission, he has not learned to come to grips with or articulate these feelings of resentment. So he is a very complex and confused person, except when the dreams come out and he knows exactly what he has to do. And so it gives him a physical source of action but it doesn't give him a blueprint for his emotions. That is where a lot of his conflict comes in.
STEVE: *How did you get started doing NEXUS?*
MIKE: Well, you introduced me to the guys at Capital Comics, which is the publishing branch of Capital City Distribution here in Madison, Wisconsin. **John Davis**, is the head, **Milton Griepp** is the business manager, and **Rich Bruning** is the editor and art director. Then they've got **Karin Price, Stephen Welch** and **Les Dorscheid** on board at the art shop. Gee, you wouldn't think it takes so many people to produce a comic, but I guess it does.

Anyway, I told them, "We" — meaning **Steve (the Dude) Rude** and myself — "want to do a book that will be successful." They wanted us to do a superhero book because that is a very succesful *genre.*
STEVE: *Did you question doing superheroes?*
MIKE: It wasn't my first choice of *genres* — I wanted, and still want, to do a realistic soap opera — but I have always been interested in doing superheroes. Of course, anything that I would do for comics would have a high degree of action, because it is such a wonderful form for that. It is silly to use a comic-book form, if you are not going to put in a lot of action.
STEVE: *What do you mean?*
MIKE: I mean the comic-book form legitimizes the most outlandish behavior, specifically physical behavior. It is so much more harder to convince your audience in other forms, such as prose or

Mike Baron

because crimes offend his sense of justice."



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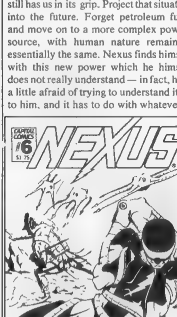
From NEXUS #4. Words by Mike Baron, art by Steve (the Dude) Rude.

movies. You can do it, of course, but it is a lot easier to do it in comics. And as long as comics so easily make impossible things seem possible — you will not only believe that a man can fly, you will believe that a man can shoot strange rays out of his hand — you might as well take advantage of it.

STEVE: *You and I have spoken before at other times about theme, and how the basic theme of comic-books is power and the corollary to that is revenge. SUPERMAN is a power fantasy and BATMAN is a revenge fantasy and those are the two basic elements to superhero comics. To some extent you have incorporated them into NEXUS but I gather that neither is the theme of the story.*

MIKE: Power and revenge are minor themes. Certainly, the power of the individual is part of the story and tied up with the major themes. What Nexus is really about is the second law of thermodynamics — entropy. Mankind is always craving greater sources of power, and the question is, "Why do we need these greater sources of power? Do they really improve our quality of living? Isn't there a price to pay down the road?" I read this book by **Jeremy Rifkin** called ENTROPY, and I really believe in it and have a lot of my own ideas about the subject. **Rifkin** says that as long as there are going to be means of converting energy at ever greater levels there're always going to be people around who are going to make use of those means for short-term gains, and to hell with the future, to hell with future generations.

We all remember the "energy crisis" that seized us several years ago and which still has us in its grip. Project that situation into the future. Forget petroleum fuels and move on to a more complex power-source, with human nature remaining essentially the same. Nexus finds himself with this new power which he himself does not really understand — in fact, he is a little afraid of trying to understand it — to him, and it has to do with whatever is



causing his dreams. At the same time it is clear to other people — not just humans but aliens — who seek energy, that here is a guy who has a line on a tremendous source of energy. The people who write SUPERMAN are missing a great part of their storyline, because in an energy hungry world — hell, you hook Superman up to a treadmill or something, and in an hour's work, he could probably generate enough energy to light up the East Coast for a week. But that is the kind of thing we are trying to explore with NEXUS — a superhero's use of energy, the second law of thermodynamics, and how people relate to it.

STEVE: *And you say revenge is a minor theme in the story?*

MIKE: It runs through the story. But it is a theme we don't want to address straight on. Nexus doesn't act purely out of revenge, because that is too simple an emotion for him, and he is too complex an individual. Even when he is committing one of his executions, he is acutely aware of the moral ambiguity of his own position. So if NEXUS has a secondary theme, it is moral ambiguity. The fact that someone has the power to deliver justice may not mean that he is the most morally correct person to do so. And is it justice, or revenge? One man's revenge is another man's justice. What is the difference? This subject of themes in comics brings to mind your title, WHISPER, Steve. What would you say is the main theme of WHISPER?

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"It's hard to come up with a moral base."

STEVE: *Betrayal. It is a fairly grim script. There is a lot of humor in it, but it is fairly black humor. The idea behind the story is that life is a series of large and small betrayals.*

MIKE: Well, I know that WHISPER deals with Japanese gangsters — the *Yakuza* — who nail you for betrayal.

STEVE: *There's that, and there are a lot of little things in life that we shouldn't do, but do in the heat of the moment. Like, in the second issue, when Whisper's roommate askes her, "Isn't my boyfriend a terrific guy?" Well, the boyfriend has just made a pass at Whisper, who wants to tell the roommate, "No, he isn't a terrific guy, he's a jerk." But the roommate doesn't want to know this, so Whisper says, "He is a wonderful guy." An innocent enough thing, but still a moment of betrayal.*

MIKE: Would you say that betrayal lies at the heart of all your interpersonal relationships?

STEVE: *Yes, but it is not necessarily evil or avoidable. It is a theme I find very interesting, but one which has been largely avoided in comic-books except in the most melodramatic terms. I am trying to make WHISPER a fairly lifelike comic.*

MIKE: We've talked about power in NEXUS. What about WHISPER? What is the source of her power?

STEVE: *Well, she doesn't have powers* per se. *She is really more of a Batman type of character. I based her abilities on the Japanese-martial art of* aikido.

MIKE: She isn't a *ninja*?

STEVE: *No — although that is the way I originally hooked Capital on the series. She has a* ninja *background — her Japanese step-father was a* ninja *and along the way she picked up a certain amount of technical knowledge of* ninjutsu *— but she hasn't had specific* ninja *training. The gimmick I used is that she had polio when she was a kid, and in order to keep from losing the use of her legs, her step-father started training her in the martial arts as a physical therapy. She has been using* aikido *movements for about twenty-five years when the story begins, so she has the potential to be a warrior. The series shows her tapping into that potential and applying it.*

MIKE: You've taken an interesting tack there. You are deliberately running away from superpowers and finding a way to make her physically adept by studying a human art that already exists in reality.

STEVE: *Well, it pretty much started when I was taking a train across country and reading a book about* ninja *written by Al Weiss and someone else.*

Above and below: panels from WHISPER #1. Art by Rich Larson, words by Steve Grant.

MIKE: Not **Al Weiss** the comics artist but **Al Weiss** of KARATE magazine.

STEVE: *Right. And I was reading about people who just apply their strengths and skills. There is really not any specific technique to* ninjutsu. *The authors made it clear that it is a technique which adapts itself to whatever the situation is. The idea of being a* ninja *is that you don't walk into a fight. You always wait on the edges of it and wait to strike. Then you strike — and no one is supposed to lay a hand on you. And I thought that this stuff had terrific visual potential.* At that *point I started thinking about incorporating* ninjutsu *into a character and showing the various things that* ninja *do, such as turning anything into a weapon. Whisper does this in several places. In the first story she uses a phone cord as a trip wire. She is not going to rely on super-powers, and any situation she gets into is one that a real person could get out of. And also, she doesn't want to rush into situations. Her inclination is not to be a superhero. One of the problems I am going to have with her is, why does she get into this costume in the first place? She doesn't want to.*

MIKE: The costume makes her nearly invisible in darkness.

STEVE: *That is the point. She does not want to be seen. I should point out that at the beginning, she is not all that good at what she does.*

MIKE: She just has a lot of luck.

STEVE: *A certain amount of luck and a certain amount of skill. But more luck than anything else. She takes advantage of situations. And she isn't particularly scrupulous about the sanctity of human life. She doesn't particularly set out to*

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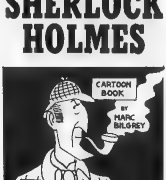

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"Comic books have inherent philosophies."

kill anyone, either. It is just something she doesn't think about.

MIKE: What is there in her background that allows her to kill like that? *Ninja* step-father aside, it is my understanding that she came out of a very innocent background.

STEVE: *She starts out as a very middle-class character, with the basic normal childhood of anyone who has been travelling between Japan and New York most of her life. She has gone to college and has a nice job. When the series begins, she looks like she is going to settle into a typical middle-class existence. Then she is pushed into this situation where she has to kill.*

MIKE: Is she seeking revenge?

STEVE: *No, she isn't. As I indicated, she never gets up in the morning and thinks, "I've got to go out tonight and kill so-and-so." She is not oriented that way.*

MIKE: No pun intended.

STEVE: *Right. Basically, what I am trying to do with WHISPER — as you're trying to do with NEXUS — is to get in a range of emotions which aren't the stock, simple, knee-jerk emotions of typical comic-books. Things like, "Oh, they killed my father, now I've got to kill them."*

MIKE: You created WHISPER partially out of reaction to what was the norm in comic-books, didn't you?

STEVE: *Well, I'd been writing Marvel Comics for five years — at least one or two stories in pretty much every book that Marvel has put out. I did an issue of MARVEL TEAM-UP in which Spider-Man backed away from a fight that he was obviously never going to win. It was just going to end up being a war of attrition between him and his opponent. Spider-Man had other things to do, so he eventually just threw up his hands and said, "Forget it — I'm going home." I got a lot of flak over that. Several people told me that Spider-Man would never turn away from a fight, no matter what. I thought, "This is ridiculous." I wanted to start doing characters who would act basically like I would tend to act in a fight — which is to try to get out of the situation. Marvel has gone to considerable lengths to have their superheroes act in very human ways in a lot of situations — in romance, for example — but as far as the fight scenes go, they tend to have characters who leap into the fray at every opportunity and beat people up without really understanding what is actually going on. This is not Marvel's fault — it is the traditional means of dealing with superheroes — but I am not really keen on characters who act like that all the time.*

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Steve Rude pencils for NEXUS #5.

That's why I based Whisper's abilities on aikido, *a martial art which so far has not really been tapped by the comics. It is not really an offensive technique. It is pretty strictly defensive.*

MIKE: I've seen the fight-scene pages of WHISPER and the techniques are there, but done very un self consciously.

STEVE: *I don't really go into* aikido *specifically. We just refer to a big, illustrated book on* aikido *in determining how the fight scenes should be handled. I hand Rich Larson the* aikido *pictures and he basically transcribes them, adjusting for point-of-view. We do try to use the actual techniques as much as possible.*

MIKE: Are you interested in Japanese culture?

STEVE: *Not that much, but I've studied it a lot, researching this series. Frank Miller was quite helpful. He scurried me off to a number of titles. The conclusion I've come to about Japanese culture is that it is not all that healthy. People tend to think, "Oh, the decadent West, the pure and philosophical East" — which is an extremely simplistic way of looking at it, and one I see a lot of in comic-books these days. Part of what I am doing is comparing American culture with Japanese culture, and indicating parallels.*

MIKE: I have never been to Japan, but **Rich Larson** seems to have captured a great sense of realism about Japan, a wonderful sense of detail that makes you feel like you are there.

STEVE: *The first issue takes place entirely in Japan. People have made comments to me that I've made the Japanese look like nasty people. The only answer I have to that is: Wait 'til we get back to America!*

MIKE: You mentioned having trouble coming up with a motivation for Whisper to put on a costume and go off on a crusade. That's the problem I try to

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"I'm trying to make Whisper fairly lifelike."

address in my new series, THE BADGER. I was toying around with the idea of a very heavy action strip about an avenger — a vigilante — and I wanted to have a logical foundation for his actions. I thought, "What kind of character puts on a costume and goes out to fight crime on the streets?" And the only thing I could possibly come up with is that you'd have to be stark raving out-of-your-mind to do such a thing.

STEVE: *The Badger is crazy?*

MIKE: He is psychotic. I am not a psychologist, but there are people out there who suffer from personality disorders. One type I have met is very, very angry. Mostly it is male anger — there is female anger but it doesn't take the same shape as male anger.

Another type of disturbed person I have met, while training in the martial arts, is someone who takes great pride in his physical abilities, who has been trained in the martial arts for many years, but who has never managed to achieve that acceptance of the world-as-it-is that permits tranquility.

And I have also met martial artists who have developed their fighting abilities to an awesome degree. Quite sincerely, these people are capable of taking on people the caliber of **Bruce Lee** and beating the shit out of them. And they are not happy — they have to prove themselves over and over again. Because in their world, once you have used your skills in a real-life situation, nothing less will do.

STEVE: *So you combined elements of all these disturbed personality types and came up with The Badger.*

MIKE: Right. He is a very angry, very highly-trained martial artist with a schizoid personality disorder. He is released from a mental institution only because mental institutions can no longer keep people indefinitely. So he goes out and fulfills his anger in a very structured way. He evolves this image of himself, in his mind, as a costumed avenger. He is so filled with anger toward street people — people whom he perceives as uncivilized — that he is prepared to put on his costume, go out at night, and exercise his martial skills.

I have to emphasize that this is not going to be a heavy martial arts strip. There is hardly any discussion of martial arts in the strip.

STEVE: *I find that martial arts is a good way of explaining how someone could take care of himself in a violent situation.*

MIKE: The Badger has no reservations or doubts about his ability, which makes him a very formidable opponent. Plus, he literally has "the strength of a crazy man." On the other hand, because his perception of reality is seriously twisted, he will make mistakes. This is something that seldom happens in comics. You seldom see the hero going out and beating the crap out of someone because he read the situation wrong. We are going to do that in the Badger and hopefully follow that through to its logical conclusion.

STEVE: *Which is?*

MIKE: Well, he runs into trouble with the law. He has a psychiatric record. At one point in the future, he is going to get thrown back into the institution. This man cannot be allowed to walk the streets. His

"The idea of being a ninja is that you don't walk into a fight. You always wait on the edges of it. Then you strike." Art from WHISPER #1.

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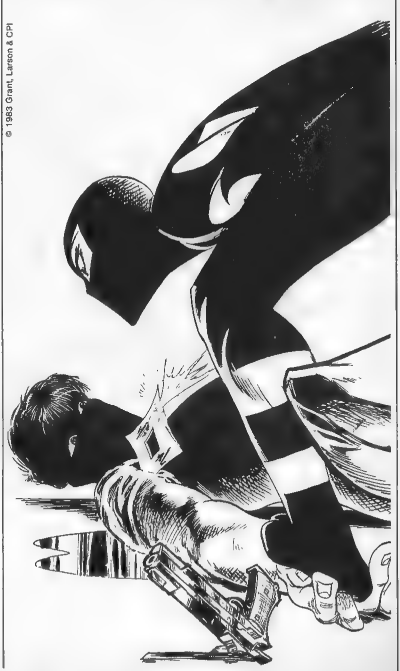

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"The Badger has a hair-trigger personality."

vigilantism is okay as long as he beats up on the right people. The police are even allowed to wink at him a couple of times — although most police forces frown on vigilantes, and quite correctly. THE BADGER is going to be about vigilantes, to a large extent. It is also going to be about the nature of madness. About believing in yourself and how to believe in reality. But there is another side of this, which we haven't mentioned, which is Badger's partner — the Weather Wizard.

STEVE: *I know that the Weather Wizard was originally the star of the strip and that Badger was originally a secondary character. Can you explain how that changed?*

MIKE: I originally came to **Milton Griepp** and **John Davis** with the Weather Wizard, and I said, "Hey, let's do this book about this Druid who finds himself in the twentieth century!" Milton and John looked at the Wizard — who is physically delightful to look at and was designed by **Jeffrey Butler** — and they said, "This is all very well and good, Mike, but we are not in business to experiment on unproven story material. Give us a costumed superhero to hang the book on and you got yourself a project to work on." That is when the Badger came into things.

The Wizard is a Druid. Druidism is a religion based on the worship of nature. Now when Ham the Wizard wakes up in the twentieth century and sees what humanity has done with nature, he becomes very upset. So Ham has a clear cut mission before him. He sees himself essentially as a protector of nature. He is also an extremely intelligent, urbane and witty person. He hooks up with the Badger. The Badger is not only the Wizard's means of learning English, but his source for the entire history of the world since the fifth century, when Ham was put in a coma. So you have an ancient Druid getting all his information on the world from a 20th Century crazy man.

STEVE: *Are there very strong parallels drawn between the two characters?*

MIKE: Yes, except this: the Badger is totally out of whack and Ham is crazy like a fox. He has a really firm grip on what is real and what isn't. He is a cynic, a bit of a misanthrope, but he is in absolute control of himself all of the time. He will never take the chances the Badger would, which is why he wants the Badger around. He is endowed with many powerful forces, but there are times when his magic just can't handle it. He needs a strong right arm. So they form kind of an uneasy alliance, but the alliance is also based on friendship. They really like each other.

Splash page from THE BADGER #2. © 1983 CPI

STEVE: *Would it be correct to say that the Badger is a social vigilante whereas the Weather Wizard is an ecological vigilante?*

MIKE: Except that the Badger goes out looking for trouble. Ham goes about setting up a power base so that he can protect nature, but he does not really go out looking for trouble. When he runs into it, he reacts in a well thought out campaign. The Badger reacts instinctively. If you rub him the wrong way, he does not wait for you to throw the first punch. The Badger has a hair-trigger personality.

"It's silly to use a comic-book form, if

STEVE: *Your two main characters seem somewhat sinister.*

MIKE: Yes, well, that is what I like. A heavy strain of black humor runs through this strip.

STEVE: *Well, I think that to some extent you can't do a contemporary strip without having some black humor to it. I think it is unavoidable unless you have no introspection whatsoever.*

MIKE: Not only that, but another thing about the comics is that it is a wonderful medium to make you laugh. Even in the most gut-wrenching adventure there are causes for humor, and only a fool would ignore them. If you write a story without any humor there is no point to having it in comics.

STEVE: *We have a problem with the definition of the word "comic" here. You do seem fairly comfortable with the concept of the superhero whereas I am not. You have basically taken Superman and turned him on his side and come out with NEXUS, and taken Batman and come out with the BADGER.*

MIKE: With NEXUS and BADGER, we put in elements which allow for a much wider range of outlandish behavior. Whereas WHISPER is a very tightly-plotted, realistic book.

STEVE: *I am certainly not against fantasy, or even the use of magic. In WHISPER, however, I have consciously limited the possibilities — which is why it is a limited series. I don't want to keep it going on forever. I think the mini-series is a tremendous idea. The basic problem with comic books is that the stories never really come to an end.*

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MIKE: You have been giving WHISPER's artist, **Rich Larson**, full scripts, I believe.

STEVE: *I work in a peculiar way. I haven't been doing the regular full scripts that you'd find, say, at DC or Marvel. What I've been doing is writing film scripts. Which means that all the dialogue and captions are there, and the flow of the story and the narrative are very concrete, but Rich still has the option to break it down any way that he sees fit, in terms of what he puts on the page. He can see one scene and put it in another place. The structure is there, but the form is pretty much up to him.*

How do you work on NEXUS?

MIKE: Well, I draw every page out, **Kurtzman** style. Panel by panel with crude little stick figures and dialogue. I give it to **Steve Rude,** who very carefully considers each page and redesigns each page, competely for the most part. He has made a number of films and has cinematic training. He comes up with a lay-out with camera angles completely different from mine and pretty much better. He finds a way to get my basic story and enhance it by posing the characters for the most dramatic effect. And then we meet and go over his finished thumbnails and compare them to mine and make sure that we agree on basic story points. Form that point, he goes on to the finished pencils, and I write the finished dialogue. **Jeffrey Butler,** with whom I've been working on BADGER, doesn't change the outline as much as Steve, but changes the individual panels a great deal. All the artists change the work, because they understand the visual actions better than I do.

STEVE: *You were asking a while back about why I came up with WHISPER, and something occurred to me while we were talking: that the main thing that I don't like about comic books is that they tend to shy away from their philosophical ramifications. And what I wanted to do with WHISPER is to come up with a book that doesn't shy away from its philosophical content. One of the things that always has horrified me a little bit is that people don't seem to realize that comic books have inherent philosophies. Even the simplest story has a certain amount of things in it that present an ideological view of the world. The ideology of comic books is generally latent, but it is there, and it is something that at least in major companies is usually not faced up to.*

MIKE: **Will Elsner** has done it, but in stories that take place in Brooklyn or the Bronx. They don't involve superheroes at all, and are essentially short stories in comic-book form. But as far as the vast majority of books, I know what you mean. They do shy away from philosophy. They only want a certain degree of superficial realism. I hope that we are trying to go deeper in NEXUS, WHISPER, and BADGER.

STEVE: *Let's just take the superhero himself. I think you are addressing this in THE BADGER. When you have a character who puts on a costume, goes out and takes the law into his own hands, you are presenting to the reader a view of the world that says, "Yes, it is all right to do this." And I'm not necessarily in favor of that.*

MIKE: It seems to me that the logical conclusion of vigilantism is the lynching of innocent people.

STEVE: *Well, there is that, but there's also the basic superhero situation that I find troubling. Standard superhero operation is to go in with fists swinging, and one of the implications of comics is that it's OK to do that. I find that distressing. People in comics tend to say, "These books are just pure entertainment — we are not really making any ideological statement." I mean, I am not a Marxist, but I do have a background in Marxist philosophy, and one of its tenets that I tend to accept is that every thing carries its own ideology. Even comic books. Do you see an ideology or a philosophy underlying NEXUS or THE BADGER?*

MIKE: Well, I do believe that the first obligation of a comic-book is to entertain —

STEVE: *I'm not saying it isn't.*

MIKE: — and I know this goes for **Steve**

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you're not going to put in a lot of action."

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"The Badger is a very angry martial artist." Burchett & Butler art from THE BADGER #2. Splash page from THE BADGER #2.

Rude and **Jeffrey Butler** and **Rich Bruning.** We do these comics to satisfy our own esthetic sense of what we'd like to see in comics. Since I am the writer, the stories I tell are based on my perceptions of the world. So without trying to stick a philosophy in the story, I find that my morality comes out — twisted, maybe, in BADGER, or pretty straight, in NEXUS. I like to have the hero having to choose the lesser of two evils, and being forced to think about his choices all the time. In that sense, without setting out to make the stories didactic — as I say, I set out to make them entertaining, above all else — they are moral in the sense of projecting my own world-view and morality.

STEVE: *If you look at superheroes, they pretty much all stand for Truth, Justice and the American Dream. In other words, they are basically Establishment superheroes.*

MIKE: There is a great difference between morality and the Establishment. I enjoy moral stories as long as they don't beat me over the head. I like to see an underlying morality tarnished but surviving. I think that's the best we can hope for. For example, the wonderful thing about a character such as **John D. MacDonald's** Travis McGee is that he always knows what the right thing is. Even though he doesn't always do it, he tries. He reaches a bittersweet point between idealism and realism. That's what I would like to do in my stories.

What about WHISPER? Is it going to end with her shafting everybody?

STEVE: *No, it isn't. The series is about Whisper's education in ways of the world, and while she is fairly innocent in the beginning, she is un-innocent at the end. Every time in the story she thinks she has found a moral base, it erodes under her. An underlying theme is the development of a morality. It is hard to come up with a solid, moral base. I haven't worked it out yet, but Whisper's living up to her morality may involve a tremendous betrayal. I don't want to get into it much more than that.*

MIKE: Suffice it to say that you are not planning to betray the reader.

STEVE: *I am not going to eliminate that possibility.*

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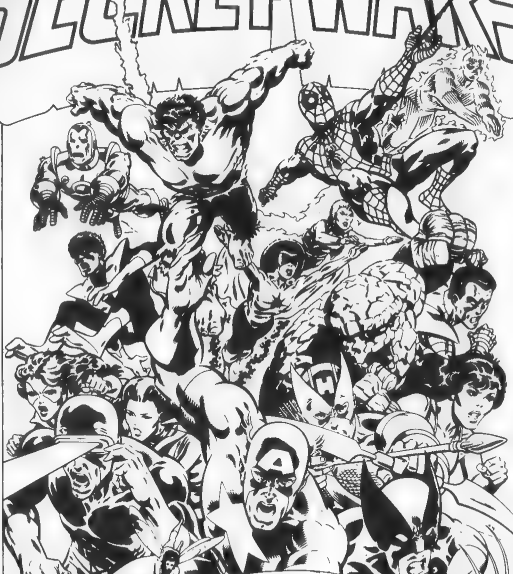

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"ZIPPY seems to be serenely crazy."

BILL GRIFFITH

"Yow!" exclaims Zippy the Pinhead — and with good reason. The microcephalic comics character has grown from an obscure hero of the counterculture to a celebrity of national renown, with all the usual mainstream merchandising — buttons, T-shirts, even (as readers of PLAYBOY recently learned) a large-and-pricey Zippy doll. He is known for uttering gems of cosmic enlightenment in the form of such Zippyisms as "Chubby Checker just had a chicken sandwich in downtown Duluth!" and the classic question, "Am I having fun yet?"

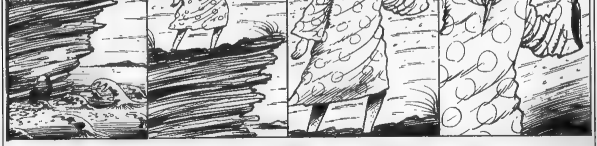
Zippy's creator, cartoonist Bill Griffith, counts among his major influences such diverse figures as movie directors Sam Fuller and Preston Sturges, surrealist playwright Alfred Jarry, and TV's "Sgt. Bilko," Phil Silvers. Intrepid interviewer Bruce Sweeney penetrated the remote fastness of "the Griffith Observatory" in San Francisco, and elicited from Bill a host of forthright, often sardonic observations about comics and comix, pinhead presidential politicking, freaks (inside and outside comics), and what happens when counterculture meets capitalism . . .

BRUCE SWEENEY: *There's a Zippy the Pinhead doll on the market for $250. My question is: Has capitalism spoiled Bill Griffith?*

BILL GRIFFITH: Two hundred and fifty dollars is a lot of money to pay for a doll. But I consider the dolls works of art, rather than manufactured items — they're beautifully made, hand-made, and of limited number. If you understood how many hours the woman who makes them spends on each doll, and if you understood, as I'm sure you do, the way prices break down in distribution — with the retailers, the distributors, and so on, all getting their cuts — you'd understand why the price has to be what it is.

So if your question, "Has capitalism spoiled me?" is related to the doll, it's way off target because I have not made one cent from the doll yet. The royalities I'll get from the doll I'm deferring while the doll company struggles to keep its head above water.

BRUCE: *Yet you are making a living and there are few of the "underground comix" scene enjoying your level of recognition and success. Why do you think that is?*



"I've managed to turn Zippy into a mini-

BILL: Hard work. I don't think I took two days off from 1970 to maybe 1978 or 1979. None of my comix have sold as well as the early ZAP COMIX or the FREAK BROTHERS, but where I've been able to make a success of this thing is in just producing a lot of work, producing a lot of different comix and magazines and paperbacks — and of course ZIPPY. The sales of ZIPPY are high, but that's fairly recent. From the early 1970s to at least '77 or '78, I survived on royalties from underground comix and an occasional commercial art type job — mostly with Topps Bubble Gum cards, through my friendship with **Art Spiegelman,** who was resident boy-genius there — plus occasional illustrations for men's magazines.

And, of course, I've now managed to turn ZIPPY into a mini-industry with T-shirts and posters and calendars.

BRUCE: *Why has Zippy clicked?*

BILL: Well, I think people like Zippy. If there's any one reason — I don't think there's any one reason you can point to — I think Zippy must reflect, through a kind of fun-house mirror, the kind of anxieties, or the release of anxieties, that a lot of people feel going through the '80s. He seems to be serenely crazy, which may be a state that a lot of people would aspire to, or experience while reading comix.

Zippy seemingly takes in all the arbitrary and fragmented bits of information that we're bombarded with, every hour of every day through media-overload, and spits them back out through a kind of poetry of *nonsequiturs* in a way that makes its own kind of nonsensical sense. Does that sound intellectual enough?

BRUCE: *Where did Zippy come from? Were you influenced by the movie FREAKS?*

BILL: Yes, I was influenced by the movie FREAKS. I saw FREAKS first while I was in art school, in '63, and was very, very impressed. I've probably seen it 20 or 30 times -- including once with a stop-motion camera. A friend of mine had a print and actually slowed down the sound-track. It's very hard to understand the pinheads speaking, especially in the early sequences when they're all surrounding the director, **Tod Browning,** in kind of a maypole dance, and they're chattering away. Using the special projector, I slowed that scene down, and I began to hear the words better and they had this quality which had an illogical logic of its own. The sentences were fully formed, questions were seemingly intelligent, but no one sentence related to the next. It was like sitting in front of your television set and turning the dial really rapidly every ten seconds.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Bill Griffith
Occupation: Cartoonist
Residence: San Francisco, CA
Born: Brooklyn, NY — 1944
Training: Pratt Institute
Credits: ZIPPY STORIES, YOW, TALES OF TOAD, YOUNG LUST, NATIONAL LAMPOON
Favorite Cartoonists: Chester Gould, Will Elder, Milt Gross, Harry Hershfield

BRUCE: *How did you finally come to create Zippy?*

BILL: In the early '70s, in San Francisco, I was asked by **Roger Brand,** who was editing REAL PULP COMIX #1 at the time, which was in 1970, to do a strip. And I had just done YOUNG LUST and it was receiving a lot of attention and I wanted to do other strips like this — parodies of romance comics. And I decided to do a pinhead romance story. And I went to another friend — an early underground cartoonist **Jim Osborne** — who I knew had an enormous collection — of freak photographs from Sarasota. In Sarasota there's a large colony of retired freaks who sell their pictures. And I looked through them one day, and it rekindled my interest in freaks. So I decided to do a strip called I FELL FOR A PINHEAD, BUT HE MADE A FOOL OUT OF ME. And the model I used was the main pinhead from FREAKS, whose picture was in the collection. Only she was a female and I made my character a male, called "Danny" — for no other reason except to give him a name.

I had come up with a character named "Mr. Toad," in the 1960s, and had gathered a collection of my Toad strips from the EAST VILLAGE OTHER and SCREW into a collection called TALES OF TOAD #1. Mr. Toad was my main character before Zippy. By the early Seventies, Mr. Toad had become increasingly troublesome — a powerful Frankenstein creation I made who was threatening to beat me up. I decided to give him a side-kick who would soften his mean nature, so I brought back Danny the Pinhead and renamed him "Zippy."

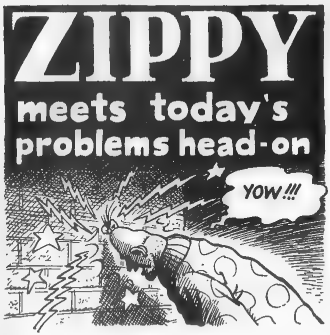
BRUCE: *Why "Zippy"?*

BILL: I got the name from the original circus pinhead, who worked for **P. T. Barnum** in the 1860s. His name was "Zip, the What-Is-It."

A little ancedote comes to mind: In 1977 I was reading a pictorial history of the circus. I opened the book, and there was this picture of Zip, the What-Is-It. In the book it listed his real name, and the year and place of his birth. Now, I'd never known any of this. It said his real name was **William Henry Jackson** and he was born in 1842 in New Jersey. Now, my name is **William Henry Jackson Griffith.**

© 1977, 1978 Bill Griffith

industry with T-shirts and calendars."



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I'm named after my great-grandfather . . . who was born in New York in 1842. Like, I dropped the book, and my jaw. I realized I had been doing ZIPPY for six or seven years, and at that point I knew I was *meant* to do Zippy.

BRUCE: *How did you get into cartooning in the first place?*

BILL: I started out wanting to be a "Fine Artist." After I left art school in 1964, I spent about four years being a romantic American artist on the run through Europe — Paris and Barcelona mostly — painting, sketching and so on.

In early 1967, a friend of mine showed me the first ZAP COMIX, which he'd bought in a Times Square bookstore. I was living in New York then. ZAP just bowled me over. It coincided with a lot of my views on things. It was kind of like reading comic-strips as if you had lived or written them yourself.

BRUCE: *Was it at that point that you decided to become a cartoonist?*

BILL: The influence of **Robert Crumb** and ZAP on me was actually more of a ticking time-bomb — it didn't take effect until at least a year or two later, when I came upon an issue of the EAST VILLAGE OTHER, which had strips by **Kim Dietch.** Kim and I had attended art school together, knew each other and had some of the same interests, but his background — in high school, that is — was in comics amid more popular art forms, while my romantic vision was to become **Jackson Pollack, Jr.** Actually, it was probably my friendship with Kim — we'd seen each other a few times since leaving school — that may have been an early influence on my growing interest in doing comics. My painting had become increasingly cartoony in the mid-Sixties.

Seeing Kim's work in the EVO, together with seeing **Crumb's** early work, made me think, "Hey, I could do something like this — it looks like fun." Besides, I was not too satisfied by what was going on in my "career." I had a couple of gallery shows but no audience to speak of, and I was aching for some communication between myself and a group larger than five or six friends and a couple of collectors.

BRUCE: *Where did you submit your first cartoons?*

BILL: To the EVO. The cartoons were promptly and deservedly rejected by the art director. "Art director" . . . I'm making it seem a lot more formal than it was. The EAST VILLAGE OTHER was, you know, a gang of crazed hippies. I then took my scribblings to SCREW magazine, and was promptly accepted. And a week or two later my first strip appeared in print and I was hooked on cartooning forever. I looked down at what was probably this ugly, scribbled strip and thought, "Ten thousand people are reading it this week!" It gave me a rush. I just knew I was going to be a full-time cartoonist at that moment.

Then I went down to the office of the GOTHIC BLIMP WORKS, which was the EVO's comic-tabloid spin-off, and which was edited at one time by **Vaughn Bode.** But when I went there, **Kim Deitch** was the editor. I brought him some strips, which he kindly published, and within a few issues I was doing color work for GOTHIC BLIMP and doing strips for the EVO and SCREW. And I was on my way to being a professional cartoonist.

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Penny Century and her millionaire friend-with-the-horns, H.R. Costigan, come to the rescue as the four girls go to spend a few days at the Costigan mansion, a building a body could easily get lost in, and some do. Then there's the party featuring the return of prosolar mechanic Rand Race and the entrance of Demona, Costigan's amazon bodyguard. Art and story by **Jaime Hernandez.**

LOVE AND ROCKETS #4 also contains the no-holds-barred conclusion to "Heartbreak Soup," which began in issue #3. In this story **'Bert Hernandez** tells of love, lust, broken hearts, lost friends, murder, and pregnancy—all set in a strangely realistic barrio setting.

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"My father told me MAD would rot my mind."

BRUCE: *Without any formal training in cartooning, it seems.*

BILL: Basically, I learned to be a cartoonist by being printed. That's what I'm grateful for — and it's hard to come by these days — that a struggling cartoonist in the late '60s and early '70s could take advantage of the craziness of the subculture going on around him, and see his work printed almost instantly with very little editorial control being exerted on him, and very little criticism being made of his work. Of course, that last part was partially helpful and partially not. But the education came after seeing my work in print.

BRUCE: *What was your next move after you launched your career?*

BILL: To come out to San Francisco, and bring out TALES OF TOAD #1. That was in April of 1970. I brought the Toad strips to **Bob** and **Peggy Rita** of the Print Mint, left them the book, and came back to New York. It was published a couple of months later and I received copies in the mail — my first published collection. It was the biggest thrill of my life.

BRUCE: *Did you continue to work for SCREW and the EVO?*

BILL: Yes, but I started to do other things besides the Toad strips. I began doing parodies of girl's-romance comics. A couple of them appeared in the EVO. Around this time I met **Jay Kennedy**, who is the author of the UNDERGROUND PRICE GUIDE. Around that time Jay, by coincidence, was going to Pratt and doing romance-parody strips, similar to what I was doing. We thought, "This would be a good idea for a book." And YOUNG LUST was born, on West 106th Street in New York City, in early 1970.

I had decided that as soon as my first book was published, that I was going to leave New York and move to San Francisco, where Kim, and **Crumb** and **Spain Rodriguez** and other comix cartoonists had moved to. That was where comix were being published. So I was convinced, logically enough, that San Francisco was the place to do comix. In New York, comix were pretty much limited to the underground newspapers, whose distribution was controlled by shady types. In San Francisco they were doing comic-book comix, which was more exciting to me than newspapers. So I came out here in July, 1970, sold YOUNG LUST #1, and have been out here ever since.

BRUCE: *Who published YOUNG LUST #1?*

BILL: Company and Sons. I first took it to the Print Mint, and they thought it was funny but not a concept that sustained an entire book . . . much to their later regret — heh-heh. I took it also to Last Gasp, which **Ron Turner** was running out of a closet, and he thought YOUNG LUST wasn't quite politically correct or something. Rip-Off Press thought they might get busted and that it wasn't "socially

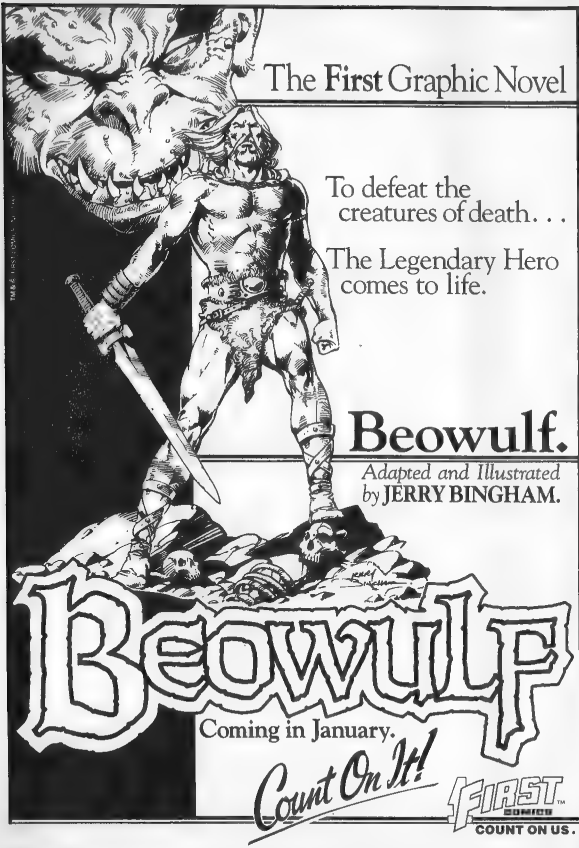
redeeming," believe it or not. But Company and Sons, which had published two comix at that point, neither of which had done anything, eagerly snapped it up and came out with it in October, 1970. It's been in print ever since.

BRUCE: *Do you still think of yourself as an "underground" cartoonist?*

BILL: No, I'm just doing what I've been doing, and the term "underground" is kind of irrelevant to my own work right now. I'm just a cartoonist, without that label.

BRUCE: *Does the label bother you?*

BILL: No. But it doesn't really mean anything, so why use it anymore? Most people who know my work now — and the large bulk of my audience perpetually seems to be the 18-25 group — have never heard of or ever seen an underground. I do book-signings and give talks, and when I mention **Crumb** or ZAP, they say, "What's that?" An underground artist told me that he gave a lecture at the School of Visual Arts, and as an example of comix — he didn't even use the term "underground" — he showed them **Crumb's** "White Man Meets Bigfoot" story, and not only hadn't the audience heard of **Crumb** or ZAP, they wanted to know why the strip was supposed to be funny. What's so funny about poking fun at white middle-class values? All they want to do is to get into comics to make a living, and political satire is to them okay if it makes money. The kids of today . . . tsk, tsk.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"Newspaper cartooning is a vast wasteland."

BRUCE: *Where are the underground comix and publishers now? Do they still exist?*

BILL: I guess they're underground again. Maybe that's healthy. I'm not that connected in the way I once was to the whole underground scene. I mean, I go down to Last Gasp a couple of times a month to pick up checks and talk to **Ron Turner**, and deal with printers and reprints and buttons and all that stuff, and I take a look at what's coming out — which as everybody knows is sparse, compared to the output of the 1970s — and once in a while I see something I like. A new issue of AMERICAN SPLENDOR or WEIRDO or something by **Bob Ostrum** or whatever. But it's not something that I monitor, or feel that I'm swimming inside of the way I used to in the early 1970s.

BRUCE: *Denis Kitchen and other publishers have told me they now point to 10,000 total sales or print run of any new underground as being a major success whereas five or ten years ago, 10,000 copies was just putting your feet in the water, so far as getting a first edition out. Obviously, there is a shrinking market. Why do you think that is?*

BILL: When I first came out to San Francisco, print runs were 10,000 and they quickly went to 20,000. They stayed at 20- or 30,000 until about 1974, when there was an economic slump in the country, as well as a saturation point that had been reached. The audience for comix would no longer buy just anything. They were more discerning. They wanted higher quality stuff. Speaking for myself, when I was reading the early undergrounds in the late Sixties in New York, I'd finish a **Crumb** comic in a half hour and I'd want more, as much as I could possibly get. And the audience for a couple of years was working on that impulse. They would go into an underground comix store or a headshop or whatever, and they'd buy every single underground they saw on the racks, 'cause they couldn't get enough. It was part of the counter-culture. It supported their values. There's no more counter-culture, of course, so that function that the comix performed — expressing counter-culture values — is either gone, or lessened to a considerable degree. The slackening demand weeded out a lot of cartoonists. In the late Seventies a lot of underground cartoonists either stopped being cartoonists or went into other areas like commercial art or posters or regular comics or illustration. Basically, it's a natural process. Nothing's going to last forever.

BRUCE: *What is the current state of underground comix? Do you think they'll go on despite the shrinking market for them?*

© 1978 Bill Griffith

BILL: Well, amazingly enough, they still exist, so I guess they have a reason to exist, a need to fill. The audience has shrunk, but it's still there. There are comix coming out today from obscure cartoonists whose work has the same flavor and tone and maverick quality of the early undergrounds. So there must be a consistent need for that, and as long as there is a need — for artists to make personal comics that won't be printed by mainstream magazines — and an audience, there will be underground comix.

As for the current state of the comix, the publishers have shrunk with the audience. Rip-Off Press has gone into hibernation, sort of, and Last Gasp is basically what's left — Last Gasp and **Denis Kitchen** to some degree, although **Kitchen** is not publishing stuff anywhere near what he used to. The only healthy comix publisher left is Last Gasp, and I think that's because **Ron Turner** is a businessman. Not that the others weren't, but Ron was just a little better, and it's a tough business. And I'm grateful that he's stayed in business.

BRUCE: *And who in the "old guard" are still making a living out of comix, besides you?*

BILL: I guess the ones that remain are **Gilbert Shelton**, **Crumb**, and I guess you could include **Trina Robbins** — I'm not positive. **Spain Rodriguez** still struggles along and still does great work, but I think he also does a lot of illustrations for some San Francisco magazine. **Ted Richards** retired about two years ago and now works for a computer company.

BRUCE: *Are all the remaining hippies still in San Francisco, or are they selling stocks and bonds on Wall Street?*

IT'S A SMALL WORLD AFTER ALL...IT'S A
I WANT TO KILL EVERY-BODY HERE WITH A CUTE AND COLORFUL HYDROGEN BOMB!!
WILL HE TAKE HOSTAGES?

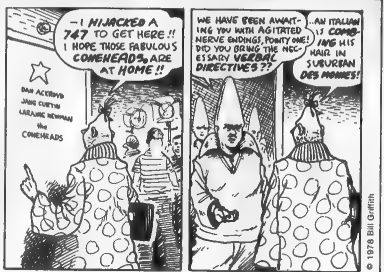
© 1977 Bill Griffith

"John Belushi liked Zippy and wanted

BILL: I haven't visited many cities in the past few years, except New York and Los Angeles, so I'm no authority outside San Francisco. But, yes, there are still hippies in San Francisco. You can walk along Haight Street and see twenty five — count'em, twenty-five — hippies. Girls with gypsy skirts, and guys with long hair and love beads, in search of bell-bottoms, I guess. And they're not old hippies, either — you'll find the forty-year-old, wasted hippies in Berkeley. But in San Francisco, I have to tell you, all the hippies are Australians.

BRUCE: *What about mainstream comics today? Are there any of them you follow — say, Gary Trudeau or Johnny Hart?*

BILL: Trudeau, Hart — I don't care about either one of them or any current newspaper strips being done. I think newspaper cartooning is pretty much a vast wasteland. Anything done for a syndicate, by definition — with a few exceptions, mostly in the past — is, you know, formula-ridden pablum, today more than ever. Strips like MARVIN or CATHY . . . garbage like that. They're just things that are meant to be harmlessly injected into one's brain without any resonance or thought, or any personal statement of any interest being made by the cartoonist. That's this old crank's view.

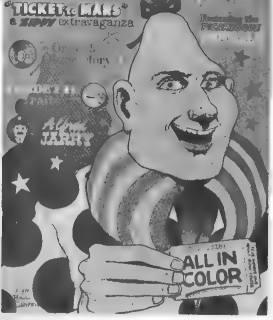

-I HIJACKED A 747 TO GET HERE!! I HOPE THOSE FABULOUS COMEHEADS ARE AT HOME!!
DAN ACCROYD JANE CURTIN LARAINE NEWMAN the COMEHEADS
WE HAVE BEEN AWAITING YOU WITH AGITATED NERVE ENDINGS, POINTY ONE! DID YOU BRING THE NECESSARY VERBAL DIRECTIVES??
...AN ITALIAN IS COMBING HIS HAIR IN SUBURBAN DES MOINES!
© 1978 Bill Griffith

"Condoning the Coneheads," from ZIPPY STORIES #2.

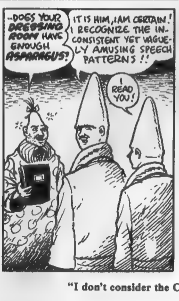
BRUCE: *How about in the past? Were there any strips or comic books you liked, or were influenced by, when you were a kid?*

BILL: I read EC Comics. I loved them. I read a few of the horror comics but I wasn't an EC fanatic. I was a MAD

The Rip-Off Press collections, ZIPPY STORIES #1 (left) and #2 (right).



him to host SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE."


-DOES YOUR DRESSING ROOM HAVE ENOUGH ASPARAGUS?
IT IS HIM, I AM CERTAIN! I RECOGNIZE THE INCONSISTENT YET VAGUELY AMUSING SPEECH PATTERNS!!
READ YOU!
..BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE!! REALLY GORGEOUS!
BEST EASY EVERYBODY... THIS WEEK'S SCRIPT WAS DELIVERED!
PHEW!

"I don't consider the Coneheads a rip-off."

magazine fanatic. I was a **Harvey Kurtzman** fanatic. I remember bringing home issues of MAD when it was in a comic book format, and my father tearing it in half and telling me never to read that garbage, that it would rot my mind.

As a kid, I mostly read LITTLE LULU and UNCLE SCROOGE. Those were my two favorites. LITTLE LULU I remember hiding under the bed for fear someone would accuse me of reading girl's comics, but I thought it was the funniest thing going. I read SUPERBOY and SUPERMAN, but I was not a big comic fan when I was a kid. My influences as a cartoonist come from all sorts of sources, comics being just one of them.

BRUCE: *There's a rumor that Zippy influenced the Coneheads.*

BILL: Yes, it's true as far as I know — I wasn't there. A good friend of mine in New York knew one of the SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE writers — and this writer told him that **Dan Aykroyd** and a few of the other writers were driving around in a van one day in 1976 and a copy of **ZIPPY** STORIES — the Rip-Off Press small-size comix, I guess the first issue — was on the floor of the van. They were reading it, and they were kicking around ideas for new skits, and they came up with the Coneheads, having just read Zippy.

Now, I don't consider this a rip-off. When I first saw the Coneheads, I thought it was hilarious. The influence was there — the shape of the head, the collar — but it was mostly physical. They didn't speak the way Zippy speaks. They clearly were aliens — Zippy is all-too-human. So I wasn't really upset by it.

BRUCE: *Didn't you get a fan letter from John Belushi?*

BILL: Yes, **John Belushi** sent me a fan letter the same year. He said he liked Zippy, and wanted Zippy to host SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE. Pinhead that I am, I wrote back to him as Zippy, demanding that my dressing room be filled with canned asparagus. And that was the last I heard from **John Belushi.**

BRUCE: *Isn't there an impressionist doing Zippy in something called the Duck Theater?*

BILL: Its official name is the Duck's Breath Mystery Theater, and one of the group, **Jim Turner,** has been playing the role of Zippy on stage, since 1976, off and on. In 1980 he did a Zippy for President campaign, and Jim was Zippy in various press conferences we gave. Zippy threw his bow into the ring at a press conference we held in San Francisco on April Fool's Day of 1980.

BRUCE: *One last question — will Zippy be running for president in 1984?*

BILL: Sure — running for re-election. Zippy's platform is, "This time, let's put a real pinhead in the Oval Office." He wouldn't mind if **Reagan** were his running mate, but I understand **Reagan** has other ideas. The Zippy campaign for '84 will be told in the form of a new Zippy calendar which will be out any day now. It's called the 1984 ZIPPY FOR PRESIDENT CALENDAR, and details Zippy's entire campaign for re-election, in 12 mock-up front-page newspaper headlines. To give you a preview, Zippy will move into the White House prematurely in December of 1984 and upset Ronnie and Nancy by singing THE FLINTSTONES TV theme.

You didn't ask me anything about the Zippy movie — so I won't tell you anything. Ha-ha!

ZIPPY
"ZIPPY GRANTS AN INTERVIEW"
©1978 BILL GRIFFITH
LETTERS, WE GET LETTER... THE FIRST QUESTION COMES TO US FROM BETSY H... AND HER'S "JUST HOW OLD IS ZIPPY"
I AM PUNK-TUTE.
OK, ZIP. THEY WANT TO KNOW YOUR EXACT AGE!!
OK, NEXT QUESTION- IT'S FROM SAN JOSE, IT'S ZIPPY, ASS, !!
...DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE QUESTION ZIPPY??
NO... I DON'T UNDERSTAND THE QUESTION.
OKAY, NEXT QUESTION - THIS ONE'S FROM BROWN'DH...
I'M SHAVING!! I'M SHAVING!!
WHY DOESN'T ZIPPY EVER SHAVE? WELL ZIP, WHY NOT??
OUR LAST QUERY IS ALL THE WAY FROM PARIS, FRANCE...
"WHAT MAKES ZIPPY'S SHOES SO PUFFED OUT? WHAT'S THE BIG SECRET, ZIP??
STYROFOAM...

"Karen Berger hates greens. Len Wein does

I first saw Tom Ziuko in DC's Manhattan offices, where I had observed him hurrying hither and yon, picking up and delivering work at a rapid but purposeful pace. Mike Flynn, prince of DC's public relations, introduced me to this young-man-in-a-hurry — who, in the ensuing months, certainly travelled fast and far, becoming one of the most sought-after colorists in comics, as his long list of recent assignments will attest. It was difficult reaching Tom when he wasn't busy coloring — in fact, our originally-scheduled interview had to be postponed so that Tom could complete an ultra-top-priority assignment due the very next day: coloring a special presentation of seven *new costume ideas for DC's most famous teen superhero – the new Robin.*

True to his word, Tom got back to me the moment he was through . . .

Photo: Nansi Hoolahan

DAK: *Well, how did it go? Did you get them done?*

TOM ZIUKO: Yes, I did. I got all seven of 'em done — each one different from the next. You know, Robin's costume colors are green and red, essentially, and when I spoke to **Marv Wolfman**, who's now editing the book along with **George Perez**, and asked him if they want to keep the old Robin colors or get away from them — establishing a new visual identity for him — basically Marv said we should reflect Batman's colors but not copy them. So I took Batman's colors and reversed them. In other words, gray gloves and boots and dark blue tights, and then I took it from there — that base with a yellow costume, and then with a red one, and then a white one — you know, through the whole gamut of available colors.

DAK: *Well, besides Robin, you've also had your hands full lately with SWORD OF THE ATOM, AMETHYST, and THRILLER. You've sort of become DC's mini-series coloring specialist, haven't you?*

TOM: Seems that way. And now I'm doing NATHANIEL DUSK, by **Gene Colan** and **Don McGregor.** I've also been doing a lot of fill-in coloring for OMEGA MEN, CAPTAIN CARROT, JUSTICE LEAGUE, ARION, and a lot of back-up series — BATGIRL, CAT-WOMEN, AQUAMAN — and I also did the original promotion poster for **Frank Miller's** RONIN. I'm very proud of that. It was a full-process, a shot of a red Ronin in front of a blue and purple sky. I don't know if you've seen it —

DAK: *Yeah, I saw it in Mike Flynn's office.*

TOM: I do all kinds of crazy things for DC. I did the Superman Crazy Foam package, Superman Raisins, and the Superman Cookies with the **George Perez** artwork.

DAK: *I guess you didn't color each raisin and cookie but just the package.*

TOM: Yeah, absolutely. *(Laughter.)* Just now I'm giving up coloring SUPERGIRL — which I fought against, because a Supergirl story was my first assignment and because **Carmine Infantino** was doing the artwork — to do VIGILANTE, which I object to morally and aesthetically. But I'm in the process of signing a contract now so my schedule is getting bumped around.

DAK: *Does that mean you won't be working for some of the independent publishers?*

TOM: Right — I'll be going exclusive. I will be coloring ZOT! for Eclipse because I already signed a contract to do it and my new contract with DC allows me to do that one book.

DAK: *Is it a maxi- or mini-series?*

TOM: It's open-ended. A friend of mine, **Scott McCloud,** who is working on staff is producing ZOT! — writing, inking, pencilling, everything but the coloring.

DAK: *What got you interested in comic books?*

TOM: Jack Kirby's artwork. I had started off reading DOOM PATROL, but an issue with kind of an open-ended finish — with the villain escaping — kind of put me off comics. I thought, "Gee, I wanted to read the whole story in one sitting!" But a friend of mine who was heavily into Marvel, during what could be called its Golden Age, got me interested in Marvel, and that was a whole diferent ball of wax. **Steve Ditko** was still doing SPIDER-MAN and **Kirby** was doing FANTASTIC FOUR. This was when I was in the Fourth Grade. Back then colorists and letterers were not listed in the credits, and I thought the inker must

not like pinks — he feels they look 'fey.'"

TOM ZIUKO

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Thomas John Ziuko ("Zoo-ko")
Born: 30 July 1955 — Niagara Falls, NY
Residence: New York City
Occupation: Colorist
Training: Self-taught
Credits: THRILLER, SWORD OF THE ATOM, NATHANIEL DUSK, SUPERGIRL, ATARI FORCE, AMETHYST, JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA
Hobbies: Music, film, photography and sculpture.
Favorite color: Aqua-blue
Worst color: None. I like 'em all. One way or another I can use 'em. But a really yucky brown prints poorly.

be the one who does the coloring. And I wondered, "How does **Jack Kirby** get his lines so dark and fat?" *(Laughter.)* So I went out and got one of those fat Sequoia Tree pencils you use in kindergarten and I used to draw with that, trying to ape **Jack Kirby,** then going on to imitate guys like **Neal Adams** and **Gil Kane** and **Steranko.**

DAK: *Then you wanted to be a penciller at first?*

TOM: Yeah, but even though I have a good sense of composition and layout, I couldn't master anatomy and perspective to the extent I would have had to to be a professional penciller. So in my early teens I tried inking, and I was good at mimicking other people's styles. I could do a great **Neal Adams** cross-hatching or a great **Bernl Wrightson** feathering. But it was all from my head, not from my heart. Mere imitation.

Instead of going to college I spent a few years doing odd jobs — everything from ditch-digging to chopping trees — while continuing my interest in artwork and photography, and I decided to take everything I knew about comics and art and apply it to putting together a coloring portfolio

DAK: *Why coloring?*

TOM: Well, I'd decided, if nothing else, I could surely get a production job. I figured, they paid people to sit and white-out mistakes. I could easily do that! So I went out and got myself a set of Dr. Martin's and sat down with ten random pieces of artwork — some unpublished **Neal Adams'** X-MEN covers, some old SPIRIT things, splashes that **Elsner** had done, some **Frazetta** pages from the EC s, anything that I could get in black-in-white form. I shot everything to one size, got it on the best paper I could, and I colored everything up. I had a friend who was living in New York, and I came up and stayed with him while I tried to make some contacts with the various companies. Now, as I said, I was a Marvel fan but I'd become a DC fan, not so much for the content but for the artists. **Adams** on BATMAN, and **Kane** on GREEN LANTERN. It was more or less the artists that pulled me into the DC world. So I tried to set up appointments with both Marvel and DC, and the first people who saw me were the people at DC. I got to see **Jack Adler** who was at that time head of production.

DAK: *Right, I remember him.*

TOM: Jack had been a colorist all of his life, so there was really no one better to see. I showed him my portfolio — the ten individual pictures I'd colored — and he liked my work. He and **Bob Rozakis** — who was at that time Assistant Production Manager and is now Production Manager — felt that my work, if nothing else, showed that I was thinking about highlights, and lighting sources, and shadows. I don't think it was in an effort to discourage me but just to see how serious I was about it, Jack said, "Well, yes, I think we can give you work, but at this point, we could't afford to give you more than fifty dollars of work a week. That's surely nothing to move to New York on." But I was gung-ho. I said, "Listen, I'll do anything. I'll work on staff. It's a medium that I want to be involved in." So they gave me some work to start.

DAK: *What was the first professional assignment they gave you?*

TOM: They started me on the basic training ground for colorists at DC — the digest-reprint material — doing a SUPERGIRL strip. She was an old favorite because I love women, and particularly women in comics. Later, when I got on the regular SUPERGIRL book Carmine was pencilling, I was also excited because **Bob Oksner** was inking it. I was a big fan of his DOBIE GILLIS books — I mean, nobody draws women like **Bob Oksner** does!

DAK: *Have you formulated theories about coloring comics?*

TOM: Yes. Well, basically, the most important thing about coloring comics is storytelling. You cannot allow the color to get in the way of telling the story. The way that you tell stories is with contrast, clarity and continuity. Essentially, you have to make it easier for the reader to understand what is going on. You do this by cueing certain scenes to certain colors. You have to use colors to reflect the emotions of what's going on. Your colors should enhance the story and move it along, rather than hinder it.

DAK: *And I'll leap in and say, as a writer who's pulled his hair out when he's seen printed copies of his stories, you should not color night scenes with bright yellow skies!*

"Nobody draws women like Bob Oksner does!"

TOM: The most important thing is contrast. **Cat Yronwode** was just talking about this in a couple of recent columns in the BUYER'S GUIDE. She was writing about colorists who say that they work for major companies and they're not allowed to put characters up against gray, because it's against company policy. Well, I find that totally untrue. I can use any of the colors that are available, provided they work in the scene. Granted there are certain editors who have their preferences and their dislikes as to what colors they prefer and which they don't like.

DAK: *Such as — ?*

TOM: Len Wein, for instance, does not like pinks — he feels they look "fey." **Karen Berger** hates greens with a passion. If you put a person in a green room, she doesn't like it — you've got to change it.

Essentially, if I have a character like The Flash who has a costume that's "YR" — solid yellow and solid red — I can put him up against anything. I can put him against gray, or muted greens. Basically the only thing you wouldn't want to put him up against is some kind of muddy brown, and the reason for that is there would be no contrast. You wouldn't see him. So when Cat says you can't put somebody up against gray, you have to use judgement. You don't put Batman up against gray, because his costume is gray and you're not going to see him.

DAK: *What would you say would be the hardest characters or books to color?*

TOM: Well, a book like AMETHYST is going to be incredibly difficult to do, because right from its inception, the characters are color coded according to the gems that they represent. For instance, Amethyst is going to reflect purple, Princess Emerald is going to be green, Topaz is going to be yellows, Garnet is going to browns, and so forth and so on. And the problem is manifested in the fact that not only do the characters reflect these colors right down to the colors of their eyes — Amethyst has purple eyes — but the editor has asked me to have their surroundings reflect this. Castle Amethyst for example is purple; when you go to Topaz Keep it's all yellow. The problem here is one of contrast. You know, the ruling family of Topaz are all dressed in yellows, and their background is supposed to be yellow, so you're presented with problems. And the solution to this of course is to try to contrast things as much as possible. If you've got Prince Topaz — who essentially wears yellow and black — standing in Topaz Keep, you might put an orange tone behind him.

DAK: *When you've got all the characters wearing the all primary colors, what becomes the background color?*

TOM: Well, in that kind of situation you use whatever is left over. And of course you can always fall back on your color wheels, which I have found myself doing without being conscious of it. My girlfriend pointed that out. She's a colorist, too.

DAK: *Oh, really? Who is she?*

TOM: Nansi Hoolahan. She does WONDER WOMAN and is now taking over SUPERGIRL from me.

DAK: *Do you color the covers of the books you do?*

TOM: Yes, I do. For years here at DC **Tatjana Wood** did pretty much all the covers and you could pretty much tell she did all of them — she has a very distinctive subtle style. But more and more they're trying to get the people who are coloring the inside of the books to do the covers and the load is pretty much split between

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"I'm gonna get Charles Schulz someday!"

myself and Tatjana and **Tony** and **Adrienne Tollin.**

DAK: *Well, that's carrying the idea of having the artist do his own covers even further.*

TOM: Right. And it makes it easier, too. You don't have to track someone down and find out what color did they make the cape and the belt — that sort of thing.

DAK: *You've been doing the coloring for DC's Baxter books. Are there any special coloring problems for those?*

TOM: Most people don't like the color on the Baxter books. They feel it's too bright and garish. As you probably know, one of the plusses of the Baxter books is the additional 70% color. The regular books have 25%, 50% and 100%, with 70% available only on the covers. I was able to watch Tatjana's coloring on the CAMELOT 3000 mini-series, so when it came time for me to do a Baxter book — THRILLER — I felt strongly enough about the colors that I went into **Dick Giordano** and asked him if I couldn't substitute a K-tone — which is a black tone — for the 70% color. This is an incredible addition. Previously, if you had a guy with yellow hair, and you wanted to shade his hair, you had to use an R-tone — red — or a B-tone — blue. So if you put an R-tone on his hair, to indicate shadowing, his hair would become orange in those spots. Now, with the K-tones, you could do a 25% K-tone shadow that wouldn't change the color of hair but make it grayer, or duller. For the Baxters this helps you tone down the color.

DAK: *Had anyone done this before?*

TOM: Not to my knowledge. I had to get permission to use it, so it was an experiment, and a learning process for me. Where it's really helped me out is in coloring NATHANIEL DUSK. No one, as far as I know, has ever shot a comic from pencils to be colored. I know they've done RAGAMUFFINS, at Eclipse, directly from Gene's pencils, but that was black-and-white. Now, at DC we run it through a reducing Xerox. If you've ever tried to make a Xerox of a pencil drawing, with shading, you know how poorly it comes out. Xeroxes that I had to work with, on the first issue of NATHANIEL DUSK, were of substandard quality. Most of the shading was lost — and you know how much shading **Gene Colan** uses. As is all-too-often the case in comics, the book was late, so I had to use that Xerox copy, but I had to handle the issue with extra-white kid gloves. I tried to keep all the tones in the background very light because we had no idea how strongly Gene's pencils would photograph and how overwhelming the colors would be in relation to them.

Herbie © ACG 1963 Space Ghost © 1985 Hanna-Barbera Prod

Whimsy *ala* Ziuko — a sample of Tom's art.

DAK: *Did you use the K-tones?*

TOM: Not on that first issue. I could have, but we had no idea what putting a gray tone next to Gene's pencils would do. I would have loved to — I love doing highlighting and shadowing, and no one is better to do that with than Gene. But because of the uncertainty of how it would come out, it was pretty much a hands-off situation. Now I've seen the first issue printed, and I was able to get the artwork for the second issue screened. You know, it's like the photos in the newspapers — if you look at them closely they're made of tiny dots. They've been screened. So with the screened shots I was able to see how much K-tone I could use in the second issue. There'll be no strong yellows, and no pinks – night-time skies will be a combination of B-tones and K-Tones. In other words, blues and blacks. It should be a beautiful book.

DAK: *Well, that sounds good. You're breaking new ground in coloring.*

TOM: Well, I like to think so. I'm pretty much of a perfectionist in all aspects of what I do — including my enjoyment of other people's work. I always like to see something the way the artist intended. If I get the new issue of FANTASTIC FOUR, I don't skim through it — if there's a surprise on page 10, I don't want to know it until I get there.

You know, that reminds me — I'm gonna get **Charles Schulz** someday.

DAK: *Charles Schulz? The guy who does PEANUTS? Why do you want to get him?*

TOM: Because when I was a teenager he used CITIZEN KANE as a punch-line in one of his Sunday strips. Being a serious film student I waited 28 years to see CITIZEN KANE, and when I finally saw it, Schulz had ruined the surprise ending for me. I just hope that Schulz dies with my name as his last gasp.

And people will wonder what he meant by, "Ziuko."

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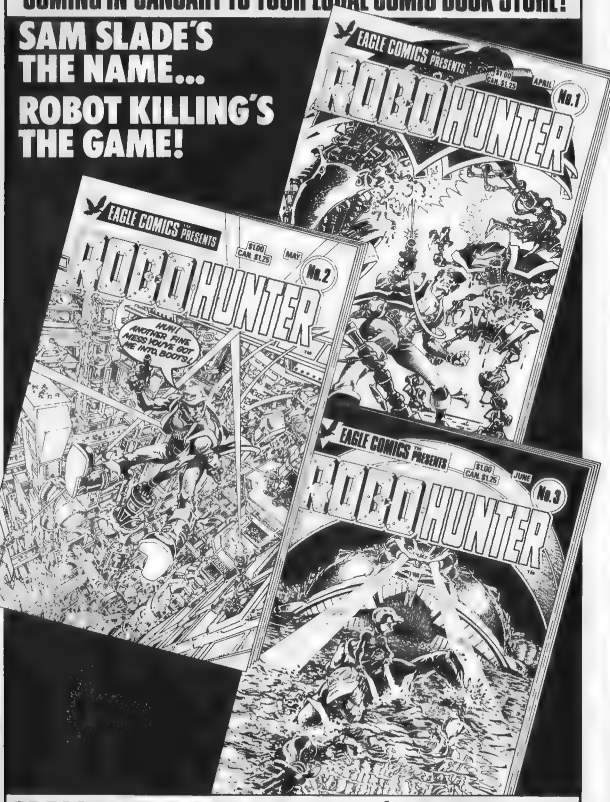

32 PAGES-FOUR COLOR-MONTHLY-$1-MANDO PAPER

"2000 AD is unique in British comics."

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RICHARD BURTON

This Richard Burton has never played Hamlet or been married to Elizabeth Taylor, but he has had an interesting career in his own right — in comics. As Assistant Editor for International Publishing Corporation (IPC) Magazines' comics weeklies, he is a guiding force at the helm of 2000 AD, the highly successful British science-fiction comic that features the popular futuristic law-enforcer, Judge Dredd. (For more information on the Judge's invasion of America, see the interview with Nick Landau and Mike Lake in COMICS INTERVIEW #7.) Richard is also very well-known in British fan circles, both as the former publisher of the prestigious COMIC MEDIA NEWS, and as director of the Eagle Awards, the "Oscar" of British comicdom.

Jim Salicrup met Richard Burton for lunch during one of Richard's frequent visits to New York City. With candor and understated British humor, Richard talked to Jim about 2000 AD and JUDGE DREDD, his long career as a fan and fan publisher, his short career with Marvel's British office, American comics versus British comics, and why comics aren't discussed in polite English society.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Richard Burton
Occupation: Assistant Editor for IPC's 2000 AD magazine
Born: London, England — 11 August 1950
Likes: Photography and comics
Dislikes: Long commutes

JIM SALICRUP: *Richard, you edit 2000 AD, which is — I guess largely through the popularity of its star, Judge Dredd — one of the leading comic books in Great Britain. For the benefit of American readers, could you tell us about 2000 AD, and what makes it special among British comics?*

RICHARD BURTON: In 1977 IPC, in what was quite a bold venture at the time — almost experimental — launched a new science-fiction comic called 2000 AD, put together by **John Wagner** and **Pat Mills,** two of Britain's finest writers. IPC gave Pat and John about six months

"There's a lot of black humor in 2000 AD."

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to do it, and they just about broke every rule in the book doing it. 2000 AD owed a lot to the American comic book style for its appearance: fewer pictures on a page, large splash panels to start off each story, and more dynamic dialogue. 2000 AD began to do things that were quite different in terms of characterization and situations. A bit weirder. Totally against the usual British tradition of war stories, adventure stories, which hadn't really changed in a long time.

2000 AD has become unique in British comics. In Britain most comics publishers think that the age for reading comics is 8-14. There's sort of a social stigma attached to being seen reading comics after age 14. 2000 AD broke the age barrier. By doing more realistic and more — what's your expression — "off the wall" material than had been tried before, often with a lot of humor in it, we've got people a little bit older reading it. We've got the college readership, we've got pop music groups becoming fans, appearing with JUDGE DREDD T-shirts on TV, things like that.

JIM: *It sounds parallel to the situation Marvel went through in the early Sixties.*

RICHARD: That's right. 2000 AD is a comic anyone can read. There's a lot of black humor, a lot of good straight adventure, and very good characters.

JIM: *Is JUDGE DREDD still running in it?*

RICHARD: Yes, Judge Dredd is still the top character and always will be. We know that some people buy it for Judge Dredd. Because of that, we can try other series in the rest of the book. We're always trying something different. If it works, great. If it doesn't we can always get rid of it and try something else. In British comics we don't have one comic for one character, the way you do in America. 2000 AD runs five series a week. Like most British comics, 2000 AD is a weekly.

JIM: *Do these series feature continued stories?*

RICHARD: Usually. We run varied-length stories, some single issue stories, some two-parters, and then — and these have become very popular — "epic" stories, usually running twenty-five to thirty weeks. Titan Books has reprinted a few of these in "album" form — you would call them "graphic novels". THE CURSED EARTH is probably the most famous of these. We ran one, which hasn't been reprinted yet, called THE APOCALYPSE WAR.

JIM: *What's that about?*

RICHARD: Well, as you may know, JUDGE DREDD takes place, for the most part, in Mega-City One, which is a compilation of all the cities on the American Eastern Seaboard. The total population of Mega-City One is 800,000,000 people, and it's patrolled by the Judges, who administer the law. In THE APOCALYPSE WAR, Judges from East-Meg in the "Sov" — Soviet — Bloc come over to Mega-City One and blow the hell out of it. The writer decided that 800,000,000 people was too many to manage, so he arranged a virtual nuclear war and got rid of about half the population.

JIM: *Who writes the features?*

RICHARD: **John Wagner** writes JUDGE DREDD, and various other writers handle the other series and stories. **John Wagner** and **Pat Mills,** who, as I mentioned, virtually started 2000AD, are two of the best writers in Britain. 2000 AD has brought out a lot of great talent. Most of them have been fans. And now we seem to have started a two-way talent traffic with your country, first with **Brian Bolland** and with others following. I think we've reciprocated only once, so far, by having **John Byrne** draw a JUDGE DREDD story. But if anybody's good enough, we'll consider them. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *How has the response been in America to 2000 AD?*

RICHARD: I started sending 2000 AD over here and the response was very good. Now **Nick Landau,** who runs Forbidden Planet and Titan Books, has gotten involved, and Titan is reprinting our best stuff and distributing it to America.

You see, IPC doesn't understand quite what they've got on their hands. They never really exploited 2000 AD. It took people from the outside to come in and say, "Look, there's so much good stuff here, you just can't forget about it. Let's reprint it."

JIM: *You came to IPC from Marvel, didn't you?*

RICHARD: That's right, from Marvel's British office.

JIM: *How did that come about?*

"Judge Dredd is still the top character."

RICHARD: In 1978, I was involved in publishing a news-oriented fanzine called COMIC MEDIA NEWS. Then I got a call from an old friend of mine, one of the founding members of British fandom, **Dez Skinn.**

JIM: *Yes, I remember Dez.*

RICHARD: Everybody remembers Dez. *(Laughter.)* He was one of the first comic fans to break into the British comic profession. He had been working for IPC Magazines, and had quit IPC to start his own publishing company, and he had produced a couple of reasonably successful magazines, a horror-film mag and then a science-fiction film magazine. And the next thing I knew he was in the process of becoming Editorial Director of Marvel Comics in Britain. Up to that time, Marvel had been run by a guy who had his own business and Marvel was just an offshoot. It was just a packaging operation, putting together the material, distributing it, and so on. A crazy situation — I mean, trying to put out monthly comics on a weekly basis, you have to cut a story in four segments, print it in black and white when it doesn't even look very good in black and white, and all sorts of attendant problems. **Dez Skinn** convinced Marvel — I guess it must have been **Stan Lee** at the time — that it could put out new material. So Marvel suddenly became a very exciting company to work for, because for the first time it would be producing material aimed specifically at the British market, using British writers and artists. When Dez asked me in 1978 to join Marvel as his assistant, I did — like a shot.

JIM: *What kind of projects did you work on for Marvel?*

RICHARD: We were doing brand-new HULK material, a new NICK FURY series, and we totally revamped THE BLACK KNIGHT, making it more of a sword-and-sorcery series.

JIM: *I think I was up at the old Marvel offices in Britain, with Dez once. I had to go in one entrance, out the back way, climb up a fire-escape, go down a hallway, until I finally got to the offices of Marvel Comics in Britain.* (Laughter.)

RICHARD: Oh, that's the present office. It's changed now. You can actually get to the office now without having to go up a fire-escape. *(Laughter.)*

Anyway, it was chaos for a while, because there was only Dez, myself and another very good friend of mine, **Al McKenzie,** responsible for the whole out-put of Marvel. At one time I was responsible for five weekly titles. Al was responsible for the two or three monthly magazines — HULK, CONAN, and when Dez joined Marvel, he sold them his science-fiction magazine, STARBURST, which is still being published. And there was one art person, doing paste-ups — that was it. Looking back on it, I think it was fun, but at the time, it was, as I say, chaos. It was trying to do too much with too few people.

JIM: *Well, how did it work exactly? I think you got the reprint material sent over. . .*

RICHARD: That's right, we got the — what would you call them? — the proofs sent over. When Dez joined it, it used to be just straight page-for-page reprinting, but Dez tried to cram more into the comic by what we call "resizing," that is, cutting up the artwork and pasting it down to get two or three pages of material on one page. Which is . . .

JIM: *A lot of work,*

RICHARD: A lot of work! *(Laughter.)* Fortunately we had outside freelancers to do that. But it was balancing that material with the new stuff that was coming in that was quite a job.

JIM: *What ended your career at Marvel?*

RICHARD: I don't know. When Dez got me involved with Marvel I was totally new to the industry, and I think, really, somebody more experienced should have been involved. In February 1979 we came to a mutual parting of the ways. Incredibly — and the luck I had back in those days was incredible — I think I just walked out of Marvel and into IPC.

JIM: *Before you go on to that, you mentioned you had been active in fandom and were publishing a news-fanzine.*

RICHARD: In the early 1960s, in England, apart from a couple of friends in school, you just didn't hear of anybody else collecting them. It wasn't 'til 1971 that I actually encountered fledgling British fandom. And before I knew what was happening, I was heavily involved in that.

JIM: *Is that when you met Nick Landau?*

RICHARD: Yes. Nick at that time was

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"We started a two-way talent traffic

just starting to publish a fanzine called COMIC MEDIA, and I got involved with him on that. It really took off. We were sending half our print-run to America. We were aware of the very big American fanzines at the time, such as ROCKETS BLAST COMICS COLLECTOR, and we thought there was no way a British fanzine had a chance in this country, but it did.

As things were going along with COMIC MEDIA, I began to recognize the lack of a good news-zine in England. We didn't actually know what was happening in comics until the books themselves actually came out. The system at that time was that American comics were brought over, we found out, essentially as ballast for ships. *(Laughter.)* We were never exactly sure what we were going to get next. Like, we very rarely got first issues. We just got the returns from America, I think.

JIM: *I wonder if American publishers were aware of that.*

RICHARD: I don't know. We'd usually get a new comic, issue #2 or #3, and we'd be very confused about what was going on in the storyline. That was the only way to get American comics at that time.

JIM: *Were you at all interested in any British comics?*

RICHARD: Not really, at that time.

JIM: *What was the big British comic at that time?*

RICHARD: When I was getting into American comics there was a very famous British comic called EAGLE which, for its time, was probably the top British comic, selling about a million copies a week. And this was when comics were really big in England, before television sort of took over and drove the circulations down.

So, anyway, I recognized the lack of a good news service for fans. I knew there were some fans, with contacts in America, who actually got news. So I decided to start a sort of a supplement to COMIC MEDIA, a news section. But as Nick rapidly got involved in things, and COMIC MEDIA's schedule slipped further and further, I decided to make my newszine a totally separate publication, calling it COMIC MEDIA NEWS. I did a deal with **Paul Levitz** to reprint news from THE COMIC READER, and that was how it was born. And that lasted for around seven years and exceeded my wildest expectations.

As it got bigger, I got more contacts over here in America, so I began coming over here and getting to know the people in the major companies. This was before they had PR offices — you had to go out and get the news yourself. Of course, there weren't that many publishers to deal with. I think there were only three — Marvel, DC and Warren -- which made things easier. COMIC MEDIA NEWS established itself as *the* news-zine in Britain. At one point, I was reaching 17 different countries, not in vast quantities, but enough to establish an international readership.

JIM: *I remember it. It was a very well-done, nicely-designed magazine.*

RICHARD: I didn't say that, but thank you for the compliment. *(Laughter.)* I enjoyed doing it. It opened so many doors in the comics industry for me. I got to know people both in this country and in England.

JIM: *And the contacts you made then led to your joining IPC right after Marvel?*

RICHARD: **Nick Landau** had gotten involved with 2000 AD soon after it appeared, and I had been keeping in touch with him. In the winter of 1979, when I was leaving Marvel, I heard there was an opening in IPC — not on 2000 AD, but on a brand-new comic they were launching called TORNADO, which Nick was also working on. So I went down to IPC and said, "Look, I've had five months experience with Marvel doing the kind of work that would give you five years experience!" *(Laughter.)* And I got the job — with a doomed comic. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *What happened to it?*

RICHARD: In Britain, when a new comic is launched, it's a tradition that you advertise it heavily on television. For some reason, comics don't have a chance if they're not advertised on TV. Somehow, somebody forgot to put the ad out for TORNADO, so the first issue went out without any TV advertising. It probably sold a single copy. TORNADO ran a grand total of 22 weeks before it folded.

JIM: *But you stayed on with IPC.*

RICHARD: At IPC — more then, than now — if your publication folds, or merges with another title, you don't lose your job, you're shifted on to another title. I was shifted on to TIGER, a sports comic for

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with the USA, first with Brian Bolland."

kids. I got to know the people doing 2000 AD quite well, and when the Assistant Editor — my predecessor — left, they let me in. That was in 1980, and I've been with 2000 AD ever since.

JIM: *IPC is one of the major publishers in England, isn't it?*

RICHARD: One of the biggest magazine publishers in the world, I think. It's owned by a company called Reed International, which is one of the world's biggest companies. IPC publishes hundreds and hundreds of magazines on every conceivable subject. Comics are only a very small part of the company as a whole. It makes most of its money from women's magazines. But even so, the comics make about a million pounds a year profit for the company, which is pretty healthy. Let's face it, if we weren't making a profit we wouldn't be around for five seconds.

JIM: *And what does IPC offer?*

RICHARD: IPC has their line divided into three groups. The one that encompasses the sub-teen market is called Youth and Practical Magazines*(laughter)* which sounds like quite a lot, doesn't it? The comics side of Youth and Practical Magazines is split into a Boys Group and a Girls Group. This is all very chauvinistic stuff *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *What section is 2000 AD in?*

RICHARD: We're in the Boys Adventure Group, along with TIGER, that boys sports-stories comic I worked on. Also in that group is a very successful spin-off from TIGER called ROY OF THE ROVERS about a soccer — we call it "football" — club; a new version of EAGLE; and a war comic called BATTLE. War is still very popular. *(Laughter.)* World War II is still being fought in England, in comics up and down the country.

JIM: *Any Falkland Islands war stories?*

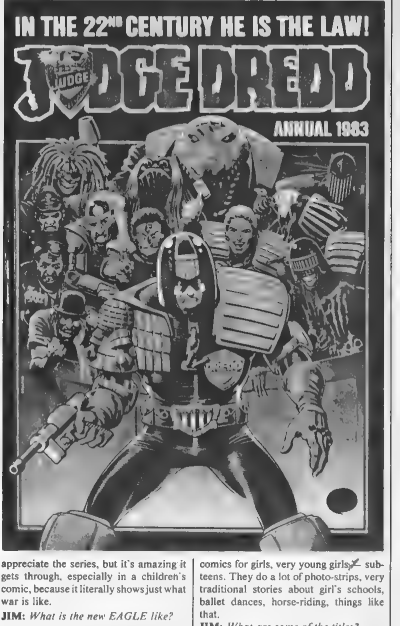
RICHARD: Yes, yes, pretty soon after the war ended. There was a lot of pressure for us to do something while the fighting was on.

JIM: *Every week you could have had another story of the battleship getting closer and closer* - (Laughter.)

RICHARD: That's right. But the editor decided to wait until after the war ended.

JIM: *Wait 'til you won first.* (Laughter.)

RICHARD: Most of the war stories are pretty average stuff but they do one story that all of us on 2000 AD feel is as good, if not better, than the stuff we do, a story called CHARLEY'S WAR, written by **Pat Mills.** It's just fantastic — a war series that doesn't pull any punches. It's set in World War I. I think people really



appreciate the series, but it's amazing it gets through, especially in a children's comic, because it literally shows just what war is like.

JIM: *What is the new EAGLE like?*

RICHARD: It bears absolutely no resemblance to the old EAGLE. Beginning last year, it has tried to experiment for the first time with boys adventure photo-strips, using photos instead of drawings This is something that's happened in the girls comics for many years now, and worked very successfully, but probably would work more when the themes are contemporary. When you start trying to do a war story or a science-fiction story or what-have-you as a photo-strip, it gets difficult.

So that's the Boys Adventure Group Then we have the Girls Group, which is, comics for girls, very young girls, sub-teens. They do a lot of photo-strips, very traditional stories about girl's schools, ballet dances, horse-riding, things like that.

JIM: *What are some of the titles?*

RICHARD: I'm trying to remember. They change so often. *(Laughter.)* This isn't even exclusively IPC — all titles of girl's comics come and go so quickly that a title you can think of one minute is gone the next. TAMMY is one title, GIRL — literally, just GIRL *(laughter)* — is another. That's all I can remember, off hand.

JIM: *How many titles would you say?*

RICHARD: I can't remember. They do about four or five. Then there is one other group, funny papers for kids, like D. C. Thompson's humor line — gag-a-page

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"2000 AD owed a lot to the American style."

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stuff. We have four or five of the weeklies, in this line.

JIM: *Are there any monthlies?*

RICHARD: No, they're all published weekly.

JIM: *Are there annuals?*

RICHARD: Yes, on all titles. I've done three of the 2000 AD annuals myself.

JIM: *Unlike here, rather than just being larger comic-books, annuals are hard cover, aren't they?*

RICHARD: Yes, and usually about 130 pages in color, with much better printing. The irony is that you've got a lousy budget. *(Laughter.)* Annuals are most profitable publications IPC does. There's a tradition in England that annuals are given to kids at Christmas, as sort of stocking presents. So that's a traditional market at the end of the year.

JIM: *That's interesting. I think one of the major reasons for annuals over here, was that the publishers felt that kids would be buying more comics in the summer, comics that would be taken with them to summer camps and vacation spots.*

RICHARD: We cater to the summer trade as well. We have what we call Summer Specials, usually about 65 pages. The Summer Specials are usually a lot more like regular comics. They're soft-cover. But both the Summer Specials and the annuals are freelance jobs. They're jobs that are not done as part of your normal work. They're fitted in whenever possible.

JIM: *Is this mostly reprint material?*

RICHARD: That's the easy way out. With the budget you're given, it's easier to fill it up with reprints. We find that that's difficult with 2000 AD because most of our readers have been with us for such a long time, that if we reprint, we'll get a lot of letters complaining. But we are able to do a handful of new stories, and we're able to use full color or process color. We fill the annuals with a potpourri of things — comic stories, text stories, puzzles, features — a good read, you know. We're fortunate on 2000 AD, because with our regular annual we also have a JUDGE DREDD annual that comes out every year. Ever since the JUDGE DREDD annual began there was a bigger budget given for it. So while it has fewer pages it has very high-quality printing, with about 95% new material, including full color JUDGE DREDD stories. It's eagerly awaited each year.

JIM: *I think that's very interesting that something like that would be very successful as a Christmas item, 'cause Winter has been traditionally the poorest sales period for American comics, with snowstorms keeping people home. It's only recently, with direct sales, that the sales level has actually been maintained through the winter.*

RICHARD: The traditional way in America is for you to go out and buy all your papers and comics. In England most people have them delivered. You move to a town, find a news agent, and he'll deliver the papers for you. So, once you put an order in for something, then it just comes automatically in your mailbox every morning. So you don't have to be as physically involved. Comics and every thing are delivered with the papers. So I think that's pretty much the reason that sales are maintained pretty much throughout the year in Britain.

JIM: *You mentioned before how the series CHARLEY'S WAR shows war realistically in a children's comic. I guess there's really no equivalent of a Comics Code in Britain.*

RICHARD: That's very true. We're very much on our own. 2000 AD has been accused of bringing a lot of violence into comics. I don't think that's true. We do a lot of action. I don't know why, but on television, you can literally get away with murder. But you try and do anything in comics and you're going to get parents and pressure groups down on you. It's incredible. So we always have to be very careful what we do.

JIM SALICRUP: *Even without a Comics Code, do you have any cases of censorship?*

RICHARD BURTON: The interesting one, which has been going on for the last two years, is that we're not allowed to show any character in an IPC comic smoking. There's a big anti-smoking campaign going on, aimed directly at the kids. Which was difficult for 2000 AD because we have this character called RoboHunter whose trademark is smoking a cigar.

JIM: *How did you get around that one?*

RICHARD: What we had to do was

"Marvel became very exciting to work for."

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make the cigar a robot. *(Laughter.)* It became a little Cuban robot who was always controlling the amount of nicotine that RoboHunter was smoking.

JIM: *Since your comics are weeklies, do you have any problems working with writers and artists on a weekly basis?*

RICHARD: Funny, I was talking to **Louise Jones** along those lines last night, asking about how much input an editor in this country has into a series when it starts. I gather it's quite a bit. We haven't that luxury in England. Because we publish weekly, we have to have writers we can trust. We literally just say to them, "We need a new series" and say, "We need it by such and such a date," and sometimes we give them a rough idea of what we want — it could be about a soldier in a future war, or about a robot fighter, or anything. We have to trust them to come to us with a finished script. We haven't the time to sit down and discuss things at length. Obviously there are series we take more time on. But for the most part we've got to rely on the writers to get the script in once a week. It's quite an administrative headache. We have 32 pages to produce every week. That's the situation everywhere. We've got writers and artists of varying degrees of efficiency — that's putting it kindly. Some are slow, so with them we have to get started on a series well in advance so by the time we reach publication they've got enough episodes in the drawer for us to start the series. Others can literally do the amount of work in a week, which is great.

JIM: *What kinds of projects are you working on now?*

RICHARD: Well, let me explain the system in Britain, or my answer to that question isn't going to make sense to American readers. You see, in Britain — at least with IPC — a comic is launched with very high print-runs, and lots of advertising. After that it is allowed to slide down.

So when it first comes out, a comic is on sale for about five or six weeks, with return privileges. After that, the dealers have got to order as many as they need. IPC, for reasons known only to itself and its hierarchy, cuts about 1,000 copies a week off the print-run of each comic, because, I suppose, they assume that's how many it's going to lose. So comics are on an ever-downward slope.

JIM: *How do you ever get out of it, if ever?*

RICHARD: Two things push you back up. The first is what we call "boom" issues, where, every so often, about twice a year, you're allowed to spend a bit extra on a free gift which will usually be tied in with an issue where we'll start a lot of new stories or series. That's virtually giving the title a re-launch. It's cross-advertised —

JIM: *Television advertising?*

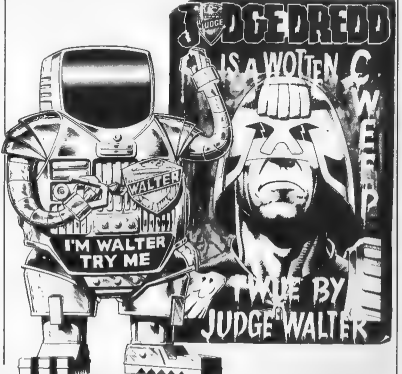
RICHARD: No, no television. That's only on a new comic. I've never known a comic that's been going on a few years to get TV advertising — unless things are really desperate.

So for this re-launch or "boom" issue the company will put the print-run back up again. The other thing that pushes a title back up, after having been allowed to slide down, is a merger with another title. In Britain there's no such thing, really, as a comic folding. It merges with another title. That's what happened with the first IPC title I was on, TORNADO. It was merged with 2000 AD, so for a time the comic actually had two titles, 2000 AD and TORNADO.

And so — getting back to your question — 2000 AD has a "boom" issue coming up this Fall. We'll be giving away a free gift, and launching a new sword-and-sorcery series done by **Mike McMahon**, who's very popular due to his JUDGE DREDD work. And we'll be doing some new series with old characters.

JIM: *What about that robot . . . the one-pager . . .*

RICHARD: Oh, "Walter the Wobot" — the robot who speaks with a lisp. He was Judge Dredd's sidekick. He hasn't been seen in it for a while, but he's there if we want to use him. He was originally brought in for comic relief, which was odd, because the strip was pretty humorous as it was. A lot of our stuff is, as I've mentioned. Not that it's "gagged up." The artwork is done straight.



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"There's sort of a social stigma attached to

JIM: *Yes, I find some of Brian Bolland's stuff to be very funny. I mean, I like it — it's very well-drawn — but it has a funny side.*

RICHARD: Yes, well, **Brian Bolland** is very talented artist.

JIM: *You mentioned television in Britain cutting into the sales of comics. What were circulations like, before TV became popular?*

RICHARD: Well, a comic like EAGLE could have 1,000,000 sales for a first issue. After that 500,000 copies an issue would be about average.

JIM: *And after television?*

RICHARD: Well, as an example, 2000 AD has a circulation of 100,000, which is considered pretty good, although there are comics selling a lot more than us. There are comics selling a lot less than us, too. But we have remained stable, which is pretty different for a British comic, given the situation I've just explained. We do a lot of heavy pushing for people to place regular orders.

JIM: *Speaking of television, I remember seeing in England a color comic that featured a lot of TV shows.*

RICHARD: Right. That's a magazine called LOOK-IN. There's quite a tradition in England with comics being heavily linked with television in many ways. Since I was a kid, there have been comics with strip versions of top TV shows —

JIM: *In some cases, American TV shows.*

RICHARD: In *most* cases, American TV shows. *(Laughter.)* STARSKY AND HUTCH, STAR TREK . . . I'm sure there's going to be an A-TEAM very soon.

JIM: *I'm going to be writing THE A-TEAM for Marvel.*

RICHARD: Oh, really? Well, you've got to get that over to Britain as well! *(Laughter.)* The show has just started in England and really taken off.

But LOOK-IN is a bit different from regular comics. You see, in England, each TV network offers their own listings, comparable to TV GUIDE. The BBC has something called RADIO TIMES. ITV has TV TIMES. Original stuff. *(Laughter.)* ITV's publishing company puts out LOOK-IN as a sort of junior version of TV TIMES, only with strips and features, articles about rock groups and things. The sales aren't great, but it's heavily subsidized by ITV as a form of advertising. The printing is very good.

JIM: *Well, the reason I mentioned it is that I wanted to discuss some non-IPC comics.*

RICHARD: Well, besides Marvel, the only one really worth mentioning is WARRIOR, **Dez Skinn's** publication, which is monthly, more like an American comic, but in black and white with a large format. It features four different series, one of which is a super-hero series but done very realistically — MARVELMAN. That and V FOR VENDETTA are the two series I like best.

JIM: *What's Marvel up to over there?*

RICHARD: Don't ask me! *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *I suppose DOCTOR WHO is still being published.*

RICHARD: Yes, that is. It's coming out as a monthly magazine. But there's only about six pages of strip in that. The rest is — what is it, 48 pages? — the rest is feature, so that's more of a magazine than a comic. DOCTOR WHO started off as a weekly, but it didn't quite work. The whole movement toward new material that brought me into Marvel virtually vanished very quickly after **Dez Skinn** left, which was a year or so after I left. So since then, it's been back to reprint — SPIDER-MAN reprints, things like that. One of the current monthly magazines that Marvel does is called THE DAREDEVILS, which, obviously, is using Daredevil as the lead material. CAPTAIN BRITAIN is still appearing as a new-material strip, in vastly altered form than was last seen over here. STARBURST, the science-fiction film magazine which **Dez Skinn** sold Marvel, is still being published. That's a sort of separate arm of Marvel and hasn't got anything on the cover to suggest that it's a Marvel publication. I think Marvel is probably the most active in the field of holding and merging than any company in Britain at the moment. *(Laughter.)* I mean, you just can't keep track of it! The last I heard they launched a THOR comic. I think. SPIDER-MAN is one of the longest running series, STAR WARS as well. STAR WARS is very popular.

JIM: *I think at one point Marvel was producing STAR WARS material on a bi-weekly schedule and a lot of the material was being published in Britain before it was published in America.*

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being seen reading comics after age 14."

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RICHARD: Yes, I remember when I was working on that. We were really quite ahead of you on that. The thing why Marvel hasn't been as successful in Britain as it is in this country, I think, is that the super-hero concept does not really work in Britain *per se*. Nothing that's had a super-hero as the main character has been very successful. I think maybe it has to do with the different cultures or societies. Only after I came to New York the first time did I see how SPIDER-MAN actually worked . . . swinging from building to building in the city. It would be impossible to do that in London because it's a lot flatter than New York without as many high-rise buildings. So people couldn't imagine a super-hero like that really functioning that well in England.

JIM: *Well, I heard that when THE HULK TV show started over there, it was very successful.*

RICHARD: It was. But then it really wasn't done as a super-hero thing. I don't know why that worked. I guess it was the monster. Dinosaurs are very popular in England. If Marvel put dinosaurs on their covers, they'd sell like mad.

JIM: *Is DC represented there at all?*

RICHARD: Yes, a while ago DC was putting out a series of monthly pocket books published in England. DC, I know, produced some special material for the German market, and they reprinted some of that material in England.

JIM: *Which they're using now to help them meet their deadlines.*

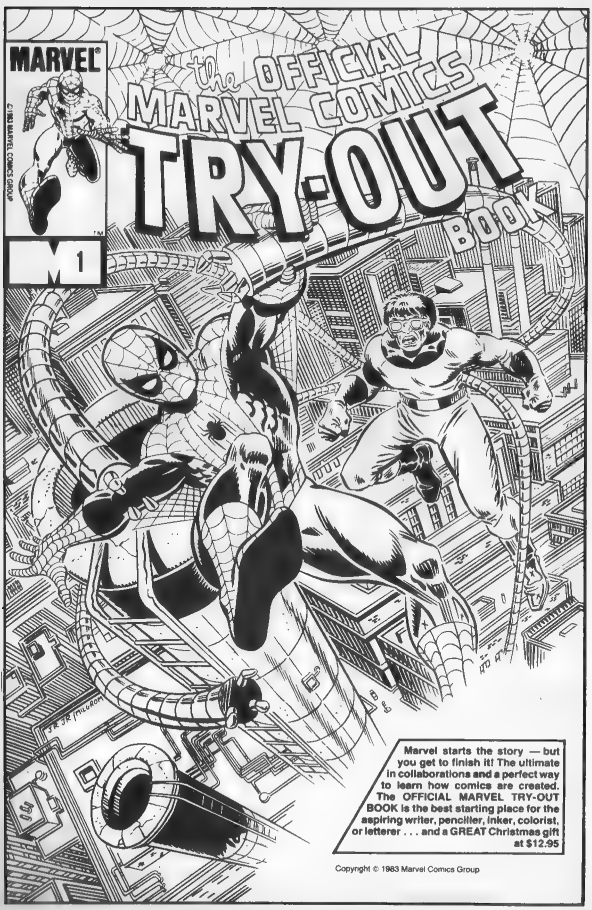
RICHARD: But that wasn't wildly successful. The Marvel and DC American comics have been available in England ever since I've been collecting. You can go down to your local news agent and get the latest issues. Well, actually, they're a month later than you get them here.

JIM: *It seems that the American comics I bought over there last time were higher-priced.*

RICHARD: American comics come in two ways. One way is, they're air-shipped in to Titan Distributors, who handles most of the distribution in England now. Those shipments are pretty much on sale the same time they're on sale over here. For that you have to pay a higher price. That whole thing was started by a couple of fans who used to have access to an American Air Force base, and they used to be able to go deal with the PX and get comics from there. And they used to sell them at a penny to the cent. If they were 50 cents in America, they would be 50 pence in England — about double the price. You could buy 'em like that, or you could wait a bit longer when they came up in the regular mail when they are a bit more like your normal cover price.

JIM: *Well, a lot of times, when I'm talking with other professionals about comics, they talk about European comics, how they're accepted by a much older audience on the Continent. But this doesn't seem to have affected England at all.*

RICHARD: England is a backwater. *(Laughter.)* I don't know what it is. I was in Spain earlier last year in Barcelona, at a comics fair that was so well attended I thought I was in the wrong sort of show — a motor show or something. It was packed. In Spain, France, or Italy comics are well respected, essentially — superbly produced, hard-cover albums or collections which wouldn't disgrace any coffee-table. Generally it's just a much healthier situation for comics, on the Continent. In England there's still this social stigma of reading comics. This is what 2000 AD is slowly changing — very slowly. It's going to take a long, long time.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"I looked up to Lee & Kirby as fathers."

WARREN REECE

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Warren Reece
Born: Brooklyn, NY, 15 June 1952. It was Magna Carta Day (I'm half-English). Also Father's Day — my dad got a heckuva present.
Residence: Brooklyn, NY
Occupation: Comicologist. Also, writer and artist.
Favorite Comic: No one all-time favorite. I like different ones from different periods. From 1930s and 40s: Bill Everett's SUB-MARINER, and MARVEL MYSTERY — brilliant in its simplicity. Also Kirby's and Simon's CAPTAIN AMERICA. From 1950s: Everett's MARVEL BOY. From 1959-1961: selected issues of STRANGE TALES and JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY — the Lee-Kirby fantasy stories like "Fin Fang Foom" and "A Monster Among Us." From 1961-1969: FANTASTIC FOUR, SPIDER-MAN under Ditko and later Romita, Ditko's DOCTOR STRANGE. Beyond that, it's up in the air.
Most Valuable Comic: MARVEL COMICS #1 — the October copy, of which only three exist. My copy is autographed by three of the original artists: Bill Everett, Carl Burgos and Fred Schwab.

"I remember the sense of awe that rocked

Many people consider Warren Reece to be the Super-Fan. At the advanced age of 29, he has become something of a seasoned old-timer of comic-book collecting, a veteran whose knowledge of comics, and memory for comics history, can be awe-inspiring. He estimates that his collection, which he describes as "priceless," contains over 8,000 old and rare comic books, as well as related artifacts — one of the most voluminous libraries of "popular culture" in the world.

Jim Salicrup spoke to Warren on a sunny summer day in New York City, at the UN Plaza, amid the racket of incessant helicopter traffic. Warren's reminiscences about his career as both fan and professional provide an eyewitness look at the genesis and growth of organized fandom and serious collecting . . .

JIM SALICRUP: *What was the first comic you ever owned?*

WARREN REECE: The first I ever remember owning was a Dell Walt Disney comic of the PETER PAN movie. That was when I was about five years old. I started reading the Marvel stuff beginning with STRANGE TALES #74, dated April, 1960. The cover story was "Gargoila, the Living Gargoyle," one of those old **Lee-Kirby-Ayers** things. The whole book absolutely captivated me.

JIM: *Do you still have those early comics?*

WARREN: The exact copies, no. Except for my copy of TALES TO ASTONISH #16, which is the original that I bought off the stands. But I have replaced nearly all the comics that were thrown out from my youth.

JIM: *At what point did you stop throwing them away?*

WARREN: Oh, *I* never threw them away. My mother took care of that. *(Laughter.)* To our mothers and our fathers, most of this stuff was nothing but a lot of dust-catching junk, and if you had to move or if you were away at school one day and things were a little cluttered, they would decide to clean out your closet, and comics would go by the wayside. Of course, as I got older, my folks made up for that. They were very nice.

JIM: *So from the very beginning you wanted to save your comics?*

WARREN: I used to save everything. I valued my possessions. But I didn't collect systematically. Back in 1960 I was a very young kid. My conception of time — the passage of time — was so poor that it was rare that I was ever able to buy two comic book numbers in a row. Now I'm very time conscious. And a conception of time is absolutely essential to keeping up with the continuous release of new comics, and keeping them filed and in order and so forth. But I didn't get really serious about collecting them until I was in my mid-teens, in 1967.

JIM: *Did you just jump into it?*

WARREN: No, not exactly. From 1964 to 1967, I had bought maybe four or five Marvel comics. They were good ones, though — SPIDER-MAN #14, where the Green Goblin first appeared; FANTASTIC FOUR #25 and #26, with the

Left: Rejected Ditko cover for AMAZING FANTASY #15, as restored by Warren. Right: Published cover.

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me when I saw CAPTAIN AMERICA #1."

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Hulk *versus* the Thing. They were key issues that had left an impression on me. So in 1967 I started buying Marvels on a regular basis. It was a very opportune time to get started: there was SPIDER-MAN #31-33, with the Master Planner thing and Peter Parker starting college; FF #48-50, with the Galactus trilogy; and STRANGE TALES #146, with Dormammu *versus* Eternity. All within the space of a few months.

It was really remarkable. I think Marvel reached its creative zenith within those few months.

JIM: *You were living in England, I understand.*

WARREN: Yes. I went to Stand Grammar School in Lightfield, England. It was a miserable, lonely time — the most horrendous two years of my life. The school was much the way it had been 100 years ago, having to call the teachers "sir," and corporal punishment, and a lot of anti-American and anti-Judaic feeling.

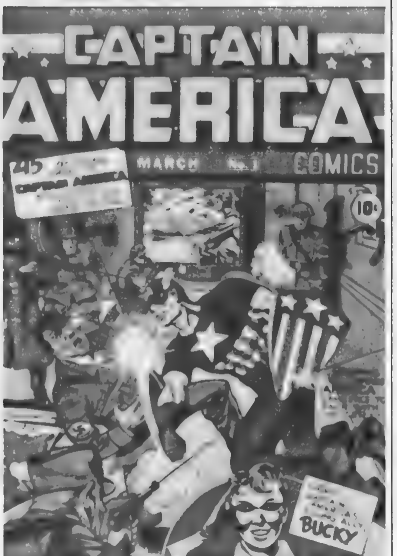
So I spent a lot of time haunting what you would call "flea markets" — the English just call them "markets" — where they had bookstalls with old comics for four-pence and six-pence. And those stalls became gathering-places for collectors. I used to go to the Cross Lane Market near Manchester. What didn't turn up in the boxes, you'd buy from other collectors, if they had doubles. I became more and more involved.

JIM: *Did your studies suffer?*

WARREN: Yes. I was so interested in all these damn comics piling up that it was very difficult for me to retain the kind of average I formerly had in school. Comics were very inspirational to me, and I looked up to **Stan Lee** and **Jack Kirby** and **Steve Ditko** as fathers. I had wanted to be a scientist, and I still remain very much involved with the sciences, since this would lend much greater credibility to any stories I would tell, hopefully, later on. Stan's and Jack's stories made an impression on me because they seemed so believable.

JIM: *When did you get back to the United States?*

WARREN: In November of 1967, and I will never forget the experience. I really knew what it was like to be an immigrant, sailing under the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. My comics were virtually the only possessions I was allowed to bring back with me from England. I was allowed one box to put my stuff in, and that was it. And the people who took the box off the ship absolutely demolished it, in spite of my admonitions not to. But fortunately it was well packed and the stuff didn't get destroyed.



CAPTAIN AMERICA #1.

JIM: *What was the status of your collection at this point?*

WARREN: I can be fairly specific about that. My Marvel collection was something like 728 books. The oldest was JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #58 from May 1960. This was because there were no regular shipments of comics to England prior to the May 1960 releases. I had almost a whole set of Marvel from FANTASTIC FOUR #1 and on. I didn't bother with MILLIE THE MODEL or most of the westerns at the time. Stan, please forgive me! *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *How did you start building up your collection, once back in the USA?*

WARREN: I had some doubles — AMAZING FANTASY #15, SPIDER-MAN #1 and #2, FF #1-3, and so on. There weren't a lot of comic book shops around then, and those things were kind of hard to find, so I would deal off my doubles, save up the money, and spend it on other back issues I needed. But I was still a long way from being a Super Collector.

JIM: *Had your parents stopped throwing your comics out, by that time?*

WARREN: Oh, they had stopped in my mid-teens, before I left for England. They thought I was crazy for collecting comics, to be sure, but I didn't ask them for much. We're not rich people, and my allowance was virtually zilch. They let me be with

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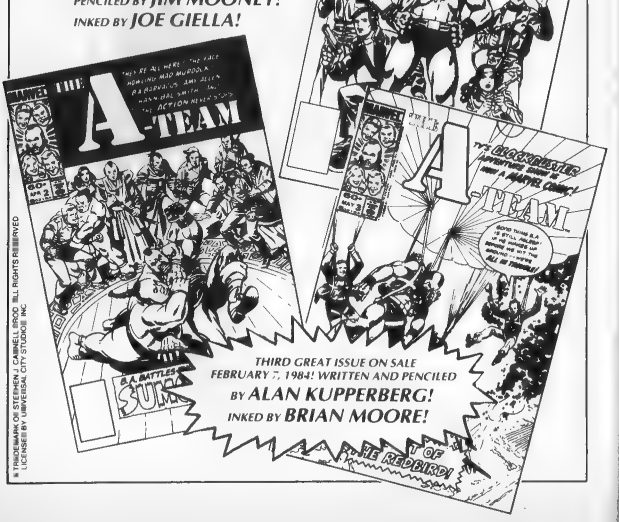

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"Marvel has used me as a researcher."

my comics. One must remember that the most I had spent on a comic, up until that time, was one pound — $2.80 American money — for FANTASTIC FOUR #1.

JIM: *I'll give you four dollars for it right now.* (Laughter.) *Well, how did you take care of your comics back then?*

WARREN: Well, that was in the pre-individual-plastic-bag era. I would put 20 or 30 comics in a plastic bag, and stick 'em in my toy chest. By the time I moved back to America I had a very capacious closet, and I started stacking them all in there. I didn't have any Golden Age yet, and, you know, when I started getting Golden Age, things started changing. I would take drawers and dirk places like that and put my best things in those. Bookcases and closets began to fill with some rapidity. This was in early 1968.

JIM: *When did you make the jump to becoming a serious comic book collector?*

WARREN: Oh, I already was a serious comic book collector. I was deadly serious about it. I guess it brought out the archeologist in me. I was always interested in paleontology and archeology, and originally, I wanted to go into those fields. So here was this whole wonderful fantasy world scattered hither and yore in these issues. As you can imagine, when I found out there was a Golden Age, also — well! I didn't know about them, of course, until Marvel published MARVEL SUPER HEROES #1 in 1966, and that was the first time that I heard there was such a thing as MARVEL MYSTERY COMICS.

Collecting became a reconstruction of the past. And the comics became the only real textbooks that were available to learn about these characters — the old TORCH or SUB-MARINER. Access to the creators was almost impossible at the time. Lord, what I would have given for an afternoon with **Stan Lee** or **Jack Kirby** back then!

JIM: *When you started up your collection, after your return to America, did you specialize in anything?*

WARREN: I was buying pre-hero comics — STRANGE TALES, JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY, things like that. They were about 75¢ apiece, in those days. That's how my three dollar allowance was spent. I used to buy four comics a week.

JIM: *What was your first convention?*

WARREN: The first **Phil Seuling** International Convention of Comic Art in July of 1968.

JIM: *How did you find out about the convention?*

WARREN: My father told me, of all people! *(Laughter.)* He read about it in the newspaper. I never paid much attention to the newspapers so I didn't know. I arrived at the last hour of the last day, with about $100 I'd saved up. Nevertheless, within that last hour I managed to get CAPTAIN AMERICA #1, MARVEL MYSTERY #13 (with the origin of the Vision), #24 and #28 (which was the first appearance of Jimmy Jupiter). I paid $125 for the lot. And with a little trading I managed to get a copy of MARVEL BOY #1, which was a beautiful book. And I also got my first glimpse at a copy of MARVEL COMICS #1. It was back-coverless, unfortunately, and it was also not for sale. But I still remember the sense of absolute awe and wonder that rocked me when I saw MARVEL #1 and CAP #1. Just shook me. It was incredible

JIM: *Was that your first contact with what is now called "organized fandom"?*

WARREN: If you mean conventions and stuff like that, yeah. I mean, I always had some contact with what I would call an organized fandom — like the big collectors around Manchester way — so I was always in touch with them. I'm sure most of those people have long since gotten out of the hobby.

JIM: *What keeps you in it?*

WARREN: Well, I'm past the point of no return. It's a feeling of responsibility I have to keep these sets going. You've got to figure that I've got one of the top three or top five collections of Marvel Comics and related items in the world. **George Olshevsky** has more of the superhero

Photo: Jim Salicrup

"Getting to know Stan Lee made trouble for

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stuff than me, but his doesn't bother with the pre-heroes, and with the related items. I may well have more Marvel Comics over-all from 1939 and on than he does. And Marvel certainly doesn't have them all. So it seems that somebody should be keeping an archives of all this stuff, good, bad or indifferent. I don't like everything that I collect, but I collect it anyway.

JIM: *Why is that?*

WARREN: To keep the sets going. Because Marvel is an interconnected series of story-lattices. It's a Marvel Universe. Also, I guess it's maybe my way of being competitive. I'm not competitive about most things. I don't give a damn about most sports, never did. But I became very competitive as far as collecting went. Also, in so far as Marvel has used me extensively as a researcher, I never know when what will be needed.

JIM: *When did you start making contact with the people who were creating the comics?*

WARREN: In January, 1968. I received a personal letter from **Stan Lee**, which I still have and I treasure. That was my first contact with a comics professional, albeit indirect contact. My earliest contact, by way of any kind of professional guidance, I think, was meeting **John Romita**, up at Marvel, around '68 or '69. It was just such a joy meeting him. He was such a very nice man, and rather encouraging at the time. I idolized him anyway. I loved his work on SPIDER-MAN so it was a very, very positive experience.

JIM: *Well, didn't you get to know a few other people?*

WARREN: Certainly I got to know **Stan Lee**, although not very well. Getting to know Stan in even a brief time that I did, I think made a lot of trouble for me with certain people who were in power at Marvel at a time when I was first coming to work there.

JIM: *How did that all happen?*

WARREN: **Tom Snyder** was doing the "Tomorrow" show. He was getting together a show on the comics industry, and it so happened that he had me in his files someplace. I think I had mailed some kind of letter to his producer, because I felt there was a lot of misinformation about the hobby floating around by way of certain people in the media.

JIM: *What kind of misinformation?*

WARREN: Well, I remember, just for example, when **Mitch Mehdy** way overpaid for that ACTION #1. Naturally — to protect his investment he made it a media event. I don't care if ACTION #1 is the first SUPERMAN — anybody who has been through that book, and been through MARVEL #1 or a CAPTAIN AMERICA #1 will easily see that they're vastly superior to ACTION #1 in quality, and in the importance of the contents.

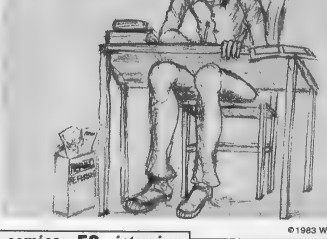
And there was a lot of other stuff — just general media hype — things that were inflating prices. So I thought it would be nice for some of us who had these very rare books to get a chance to share them with the TV audience, and let 'em see something that they might not ordinarily get to see. I figured you could get collectors such as **Olshevsky** and have a really good, informative show on the history of comics, rather than what comics were selling for. And I remember speaking to **Olshevsky** one day, and he said to me, "Why don't you get back in touch with those TV people?" I really wasn't all that hyped up on doing so, but George said, "Do it." And so I did. And I spoke to **Catherine Coker**, who was the location producer of the Snyder show, and she said, "It's funny you should call because we want to do a show on that," and she mentioned that **Stan Lee** was going to be on, with **Carmine Infantino**, and **Julie Schwartz**. So she called me down to NBC for a lengthy interview. And she asked me if I ever heard of **Stan Lee**! Of course, I had. And she was very enthusiastic about doing this show. Now, this was an independent arrangement between NBC and myself. I didn't know Stan.

JIM: *Before the show, had you ever met him?*

WARREN: Yes, I first met Stan when some of us from Brooklyn College went to interview him for one of the school papers. I showed him some of my art samples. He said that I should stay in touch.

So I went and did this show that he happened to be on, and evidently he liked

On this page: art by Warren Reece. Below: Roger Slifer.



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me with certain people in power at Marvel."

what I had to say, and what I knew about the books, and that I had this old stuff. And he knew that I wanted very much to be working up at Marvel. So evidently he wanted me up there in some capacity that could use my library and my knowledge of the old books.

So I went for a job interview at Marvel, but wasn't told very much about the job I was to be getting simply that it was supposed to involve my knowledge of comics. And that was about it. The job was about 99% mine. I didn't ask a lot of questions. I was just happy as anything to be there. It turned out that I didn't get the job. I stayed in touch with Marvel as Stan had told me, and then I was called in for a proofreading test. The editor who gave the test gave me no idea as to how proofreading for comics should be done, and then after the test told me I failed miserably. But he gave me another test. About six, seven weeks went by and I didn't hear a darn thing from Marvel. Finally I called the editor and he told me, "Well, we couldn't get you into the budget." Now, I found out through the grapevine that they hired two new proofreaders, so somebody wasn't telling me the truth.

JIM: *But you did get into Marvel eventually.*

WARREN: I did get a job in the Marvel reproduction department — which was a stifling, ill-lit health hazard. And while I was there I heard from an insider that the editor who gave me the test sabotaged my chances for getting the better jobs, because he — and other editors — feared that, with my knowledge of the books, Stan would rely on me more than them.

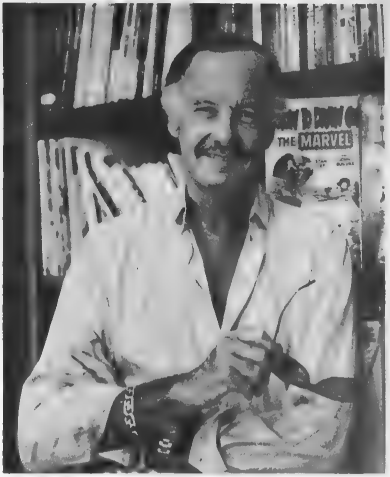
JIM: *Were all your experiences with comics professionals negative?*

WARREN: No. I learned that the best people in this business — like **Jack Kirby** — are usually the nicest people.

JIM: *Well, on that note, let's talk about Bill Everett.*

WARREN: I loved **Bill Everett.** He was one of the great influences on me in every conceivable way. The more I read his SUB-MARINER, and the more I read about the man, the more I saw that Namor was more than just a creation of **Bill Everett** — he *was* **Bill Everett.**

I first met **Bill Everett** at the July 1969 ComicCon. I heard that he was there. Hardly anyone knew the man, really. He wasn't one of the big featured guests. But I went around looking for him. And there was this tall, smiling gent in an army jacket like all the hippies were wearing then. He did an original sketch for me, which I framed and I treasure and I keep in my home office. I asked him, "Sub-



Stan Lee

Mariner was such a great concept, how did you come to create him?" And he said something like, "Well, I was an angry young man, and I was fed up with the world, and I wanted to see the world get what was coming to it." I could understand this. Here he was, at the end of the 1930s, the newsreels filled with scenes of Nazi planes and tanks lined up ready to go to war, he'd just been through the Depression, he probably remembered tales of World War I which was supposed to be "The War to End All Wars." The man was understandably fed up, even as the young people in 1969 were very fed up.

He said, "I was fascinated by the sea and wanted to create a character that came from the sea. And he would have his revenge upon humanity. But it wasn't enough to have a super-powered character wreaking all sorts of havoc. He had to have a motive. And I gave him the motive, and I gave him the power." And thus you have Prince Namor.

When I went back and looked at those early MARVEL MYSTERIES, I could really see it. And I was very impressed. The combination of the simplicity of line and his directness of story-telling, plus the underlying philosophy — it was a thing that worked on multiple levels, whether he was conscious of it or not.

I saw him a few more times, the last time being when he received a well-deserved award at one of the July Cons. He died a short time thereafter. And then I learned a lot more about him from people like **Gary Friedrich** and **Roy Thomas,** who lived with him, and in spite of the fact that he was a person, like all of us, with problems and flaws, I came to love and admire him a great deal. To me he exemplified the finest things in comics.

In Part Two: the influence of KING KONG on SUB-MARINER . . . the "HOWARD THE DUCK caper" . . . dealer skullduggery . . . in search of the "fair" price . . . and much more!

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Dear David,

COMICS INTERVIEW started off good and has now become better – what more can I say? I like what I see. Already you've interviewed such greats as **Dick Giordano, Steve Gerber, Keith Giffen, Frank Miller** and **Marv Wolfman.** I hope we can expect interviews with other comic people of the same caliber in the future. Personally, I'd like to see interviews with the following short list of people, I hope that you can deliver: **Jim Aparo, Trevor Von Eeden, Gerry Conway, Brian Bolland** and **Ernie Colon.**

Terence Larkin
10 Drew St,
Brixham,
Devon.
TQ5 9JU.
ENGLAND

Dear David,

I rather like COMICS INTERVIEW, but a few things are debatable: The interview with **Gene Simmons** in #2, or with **June Kostar** in #4, are of arguable worth. And I'm still astounded that, what with the wealth of French comics available, all **D. Jon Zimmerman** could be interested in was French editions of American comic books!!! This narrow-sightedness seems to be symptomatic of American comic-book fandom, producing the glut of superhero features we know today.

More's the pity.
The mag is fine, overall, though!

Patrick Marcel
8/17 Residence des Pres
Lenclos
62780 Cucq
FRANCE

BRING ME THE HEAD OF GARY GROTH

David,

Finished issue #6 a short time ago, and I thought I would drop you a line with a couple of thoughts on its content.

Thanks for the **Berke Breathed** interview. I became a fan of BLOOM COUNTY after thumbing through and then buying a copy of "Loose Tails". And now the local paper has finally picked up the strip, and they will begin running it in about a week. The only drawback being (**Cat Yronwode** won't like this) that to make room for it they will be dropping STEVE CANYON. By the way, when will the next NASA expedition to the wild planet of belly dancing stewardesses be leaving? That sounds like a pretty good deal.

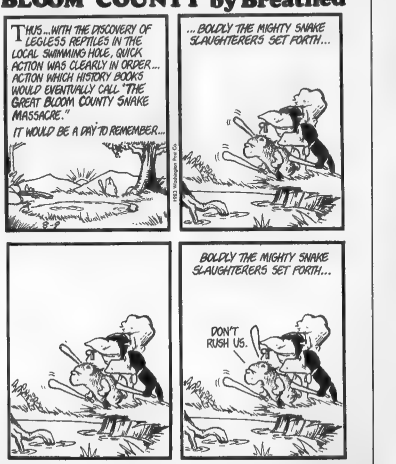
I imagine that **George Perez** won't be the only person upset over the developments involving the JLA/AVENGERS crossover now that COMICS INTERVIEW #6 has hit the stands. It could easily leave the previous crossovers miles behind, and it would be a shame to let George's art and emotional involvement go to waste. I hope that **Jim Sallcrup** will be able to get **Jim Shooter's** side of the story for a future issue.

I also enjoyed the second part of the interview with **Wendy** and **Richard Pini.** It is good to read about a creative team that cares about what they do the way that the **Pinis** do. By the way, in the near future, I hope to be able to send you an interview with **Colleen Doran,** who is drawing A DISTANT SOIL, published by WaRP Graphics.

All in all, I would have to say that issue #6, like its predecessors, was a very enjoyable issue, and I will close with the obligatory suggestions for future interview subjects. **Walt Simonson** & **Louise Jones, Gene Colan,** and **Jo Duffy** would make for interesting reading, and if you could swing it, an interview with **Gary Groth** would really be worth the cover price.

Brian Talley
310 Charles St. #1
Newport News, VA 23602

You've anticipated us, Brian. As covered elsewhere on this letters page, we'll be having a word with Walt in #9. And way back when COMICS INTERVIEW #1 appeared in print, Gary Groth and I crossed paths at DC Comics one afternoon, where he complimented me on the magazine. He also agreed to an interview (along with Kim Thompson) and it's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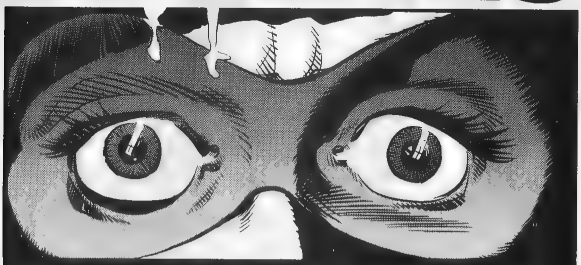

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only been busy schedules on all sides that has delayed the feature.

— DAK

REFUSES TO BUY MARVEL COMICS

Dear Dave:

First and foremost, congratulations on six great issues of a simply wonderful magazine. You have this fan hooked for life. Thanks!

Your interviews consist of important issues that stimulate my thinking. But! (There's always a but.) Please don't interview people who have constantly been interviewed in other fan magazines, like **Steve Gerber** and **Steve Engelhart, John Byrne, Frank Miller** (who was in #2, so I guess you won't have him for ages), **Chris Claremont** and others who have been in the fan spotlight far too long. It's not that what they have to say might be worthless, it's just that a fan can get awfully bored with "hearing" the same things over and over again.

My suggestions for future interviews? I am sure that you will find them interesting: publisher **Bill Black** of Americomics or any member of his staff. Anyone from Eclipse or Pacific. **John Carbonaro** of JC Comics. **Mike Gustovitch, Bill Reinhold, Steve Ditko, Gerry Conway, Mark Wheatley** and **Mark Hemple, Jerry Siegel, Neal Adams, Bruce Jones, Roger McKenzie** (on his Pacific Work). **Dave Stevens, Trevor Von Eeden, Carmine Infantino, Marty Greim, Mike Baron, Steve Rude, George Tuska, Gary Friedrich, Gardner Fox, Mike Ploog, Jim Mooney, Don Heck, Mike Fleisher, Don Perlin.** "Phew!" There are so many more — but I think that you get the idea. Oh, yes, **Doug Moench** is a definite must!

On to the interviews in #6: The **George Perez** and **Roy Thomas** interview confirmed what I had previously thought of **Mr. Shooter** — that his prime concern is advancing his career, while stepping on past administrations of Marvel editors and writers and artists, which is why I *refuse* to buy any Marvel comic. I realize that one person's dropping Marvel will not put Marvel out of business, but for once I'm gonna put my money where my mouth is and buy from the independent publishers — at least I get what I'm paying for.

The **Richard** and **Wendy Pini** interview was mildly interesting — mostly because I don't care for ELFQUEST.

As for **Mike Friedrich**, it's sad that he doesn't have anything to write about. Having read and loved the IRON MANs that he did with **George Tuska** I must say that his absence is sorely missed. His assessment of Marvel's and DC's copyright situation rings all too true. At least Red Circle has a situation where creator-owned characters are integrated with company-owned characters (witness Darkling, Humongous, and Mister Midnight).

As for what **Ed Thomas** said, it's true these guys like **Frank Miller, John Byrne** and **Bob Layton** stay on these strips for a year-and-a-half or two years, changing characters who have personality and re-making them in their own image. I think that's unfair. They do their damage without even giving the slightest consideration for the personality that those characters had all those years. That never used to happen at the Marvel that I knew (before **Jim Shooter**, the Doomsday Editor).

Dave, you should create your own character, perhaps at Red Circle — after all, you worked with editor **Rich Buckler** at Atlas on DEMON-HUNTER. Knowing

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

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the tremendous talent that you have, you would create a really off-the-wall superhero. How 'bout it?

Jonathan Smith
(Address withheld by request)

Actually, Jonathan, I have a file folder bulging with new comics ideas — but would you believe I've just been too blamed busy with COMICS INTERVIEW and regular writing assignments for the past year or two to do anything about it? But don't give up hope. Who knows — I may spring something on you when you least expect it.

As for Doug Moench's being "a definite must," watch for COMICS INTERVIEW #10 — our cover feature and interview with Doug offers a first look at his new AZTEC ACE!

— DAK

© 1983 Thomas, Russell and Gilbert

ELRIC art by Craig Russell and Michael Gilbert

CRAIG'S CORRECTIONS

Dave —

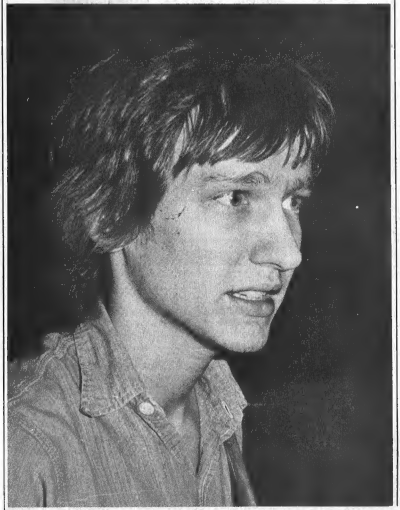
A bit of a correction here. In COMICS INTERVIEW #6 I was given sole credit as artist on the present ELRIC series. Actually, it's a collaboration between myself and **Michael T. Gilbert.**

As a generality, I do the layouts and the inking. Michael does penciling, character design and special processes.

Occasionally, our paths overlap. For example — in issue #3, I designed Arioch and penciled his pages. In issue #5, Michael did layouts for pages 24-28. I sometimes pencil backgrounds and Elric's face — Michael conceptualizes the covers and splash pages. Michael colored most of issue #4. (I wish he'd color *all* of issue #5.)

Craig Russell
Kent, Ohio

Craig Russell



GOOD WORK!

Dear DAK,

I really LOVE your mag. Ever since PEOPLE grew out of the "People Section" of TIME magazine, I always thought one could succeed if he were able to enlarge a popular PART of a popular item. You've done just that — taken the popular interviews that appear in EVERY fanzine worth its salt. And you're doing a solid, enjoyable job of it. This compliment is only one of my reasons for writing . . .

I also have to tell you how much I enjoyed the **Tony Isabella** interview. Tony was one of my favorite people in the comics industry. When we were both saddled with the insignificant "Story Editor" title at DC, Tony warned me of the future of DC on the corporate level. Hindsight on my part has proven Tony's foresight as remarkable, to say the least. Tony also had the wisdom to move out of the corporate "prison" many years prior to my similar move. I only wish I had listened to him then . . . Beyond that, you could do a few whole issues filled with **Tony Isabella** interviews and still not cover all the behind-the-scenes stories Tony could tell. My thanks for this delightful interview . . .

My next reason for writing begins on a sad note. You're probably aware by this

JIM STARLIN

STARLIN speaks about **Warlock, Captain Marvel & Dreadstar** — GERBER, AUSTIN & OLIFF on **Deaths of Superheroes** — DC's DICK GIORDANO, part 1 — From FOSTER to FRAZETTA — The last ROY G. KRENKEL interview — Cover by STARLIN.

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time that COMICS SCENE has bitten the dust. If you read the coming attractions in #11 (the very last issue), you noticed that an up-coming feature was to be an interview of **Walt Simonson** conducted by yours truly. I would be really proud to be a part of your publication and I wish the idea to offer the interview to you (after COMICS SCENE's end) were mine. In fact, it was **Walt Simonson,** himself, who suggested it.

I'll be looking forward to hearing from you and, to use that time-honored cliche: Keep up the good work!

Jack C. Harris
788 Pine Shore Rd.
Toms River, NJ 08753

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Gee, it's good to hear from you, Jack! I remember when we worked together ever-so-briefly on BLACKHAWK at DC back in the mid-Seventies. You were a pleasure to work with, and I'd be delighted to have a fellow industry insider such as yourself doing occasional interviews here — especially with such top talents as Walt Simonson.

I've scheduled your interview right away (for next issue), and look forward to many more!

— DAK

JLA-AVENGERS GEORGE PEREZ

GEORGE PEREZ & ROY THOMAS tell all— WENDY & RICHARD PINI, inside **Elfquest,** part 2 — BERKE BREATHED blabs about **Bloom County** — lots more! Awesome cover by PEREZ!

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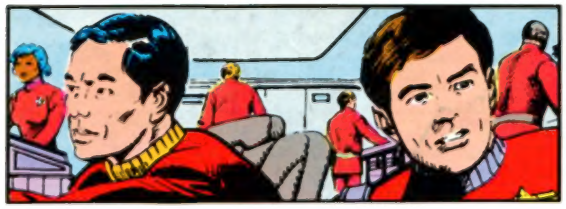

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